A MILITARY HISTORY OF AFGHANISTAN

From the Great Game to the Global War on Terror

ALI AHMAD JALALI

A Military History of Afghanistan

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Foreword

Ali Ahmad Jalali is a professional soldier and politician as well as a noted scholar with an exceptionally acute analytical mind to complement his deep understanding of Afghanistan's military and political history. An addition to his accomplished works on his country, *A Military History of Afghanistan* is magisterial in its scope and scholarship, yet highly readable to academic and lay historian alike. It is an absorbing account of a country that evokes emotion in most of us, whether because of a romantic understanding of the Great Game or as a result of more recent conflicts that have frequently dominated our television screens. Professor Jalali sheds fresh light on the Mujahedeen's role in a war that contributed directly to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of the Taliban before finally examining the well-intentioned but often rather clumsy attempts to ensure the Taliban do not reassert their rule in Kabul after the post-9/11 invasion. The key to his analysis, placing recent conflicts in vital context, is the two thousand years of history that precedes the last 30, something I found of particular value and import.

Wars and warriors, armies and clannish fighters, foreign invasion and popular resistance all figure prominently in the long history of the land occupied by the modern

Afghanistan. The distinctive geography of the country has shaped its history, which is in most part a military history.

As a crossroad of conquests, Afghanistan's past is largely instilled with accounts of military developments and warfare as various armies from different areas using a multitude of different arms and tactics descended upon and invaded the country. From the Persians and Greeks in antiquity to the Mongols and Turks of the medieval period and the British, Soviet, and Americans in modern times, outsiders have led military conquest into the mountains and plains of Afghanistan, leaving their indelible marks on this ancient land located at the confluence of four geographic zones.

A Military History of Afghanistan is a survey of the geographic, social, and political foundations of wars as well as the social impacts of internal and external conflicts on the evolution of military organization, strategy and tactics, arms, and armed men in this multiethnic nation. The book encompasses an immense panorama of wars, conflicts, and battles spanning the full length of Afghanistan's extraordinary history from ancient times to the twenty-first century.

The book examines the nature and conduct of military action by different armies, with varying arms and equipment at different stages of history, offering insights into the politics and statecraft of each age, which was often decided by military exigencies. Political history has until very recent times been a narrative of military strength, hegemony, and dynamism. Yet history has witnessed powerful armies handicapped by nonmilitary factors such as terrain and hostile populations as well as their own faulty strategies and flawed tactics, let alone the impact of unanticipated adversaries. Since much of Afghanistan's history is the story of wars, battles, generals, and the common soldier, this work undoubtedly sheds much light on the tumultuous and dynamic history of the country as a whole.

No work has hitherto chronicled the vast and rich accounts of Afghanistan’s military history in the comprehensive manner achieved in this work by Jalali. A series of books and professional studies focusing on separate wars and battles have been published in the past, particularly on Anglo-Afghan wars in the nineteenth century by British authors. Recently all published historical studies on Afghanistan either lack professional military focus or look at single wars and conflicts.

This volume provides general readers of military history, as well as scholars and professionals, with the definitive history of warfare in Afghanistan. While its principal focus is the era of British conquest, the Soviet invasion, the civil war and rise of the Taliban, and the subsequent US-led invasion, the book, broad in scope and based on authoritative primary sources, covers ancient conquerors and modern invasions with equal rigor. With its all-encompassing illustrative details and analytical features, in my judgment this book deserves to become a locus classicus in the annals of Afghanistan’s military history, and indeed of military history more generally.

David Richards

General the Lord Richards of Herstmonceux GCB, CBE, DSO

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This work, *A Military History of Afghanistan: From the Great Game to the Global War on Terror*, is the culmination of my research and work on the military history of Afghanistan that began over four decades ago. In 1967 I completed a preliminary study in two volumes on the military history of Afghanistan, which was published in Kabul in the Dari-Persian language. It was an introductory work and did not cover much of the modern history of the country. My further research over the years enabled me to use a large number of primary sources in writing one definitive work on the military history of Afghanistan. This has been both a labor of love as well as what I perceive and hope will be a critical work at a time when the country has been the focal point for the international war on terrorism and accompanying military efforts. From the time that I first began exploring this subject, much change has taken place in the political landscape of the country. Decades of war have witnessed the introduction of new military tactics, innovations, and strategies. These new developments necessitate a thorough and all-inclusive analysis of the transformation of military history from ancient times to the present.

The work covers Afghanistan's military history during the past two hundred years with an introductory chapter highlighting the major military developments from early times to the foundation of the modern Afghan state. The principal focus here is on the era of British conquest and Anglo-Afghan wars, the Soviet invasion, the civil war and the rise of the Taliban, and the subsequent US invasion. I also review the early history of the land, the ancient Persian, Greek, and other conquerors, the conquest of the Arab-Islamic armies, the rise of competing Muslim dynasties and imperial ambition in the region, the Mongol cataclysm, the Afghan tribes and the gunpowder empires, and finally the emergence of modern Afghanistan in the middle of the eighteenth century.

This study encompasses an immense panorama of wars, battles, and conflicts spanning the full length of Afghanistan's extraordinary history from ancient times to the twenty-first century. It also surveys the geographic, social, and political foundations of wars as well as the social impacts of internal and external conflicts on the evolution of social and political order in the multiethnic nation. For the reader to follow the course of military campaigns and battles, I added simple battle sketches using modern military map symbols.

In completing this task, I am grateful to many whose support and assistance was indispensable. I would like to thank those individual Afghans who throughout the years added significantly to my own knowledge and experience of Afghan military history by sharing their personal stories and experiences during the course of my military career in the Afghan army in the 1960s and 1970s, while serving in the anti-Soviet resistance of the 1980s, during my stint as a cabinet minister of the post-Taliban Afghan government, and afterward. They have enriched this work. While this list of

individuals is too long to mention, they know who they are and I thank them wholeheartedly.

My special thanks goes to General Lord David Richards, who has been extremely generous with his time, reviewing the manuscript and writing the foreword.

I am deeply grateful to my long-time colleague and friend Dr. Lester Grau for painstakingly reading the manuscript and offering valuable comments and editorial suggestions. I am also greatly indebted to US Army Reserve Captain Charles Bartles for his remarkable assistance with the battle maps. Chuck was extremely generous with his time and effort to improve my original sketches into high-quality, professional maps that are published in the book. This could not be done without his help. I wish also to thank my colleagues at Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies (NESA) at the National Defense University, in particular professors Jack Gill, Bob Boggs, and Brianne Todd, who read the drafts and made thoughtful and insightful comments.

Finally, it was the love and support of my family that sustained my energy and allowed me to finish this massive work in a timely manner. I am especially grateful to my wife and partner of 45 years, Homaira, for her patience and endless encouragement even when she had to endure long hours of being alone while I was engaged in this work. I would like to thank my children, Wais and Bahar, for their love and enthusiastic support of my career. Finally, I dedicate this work to the new generation of my family, my grandchildren—Sophia, Dean, and Roxana Bahar Jalali.

Ali A. Jalali
Glenwood, Maryland

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Introduction

Military history is virtually the history of Afghanistan—a country that has been constantly drawn into armed conflicts in response to foreign invasions or in support of its own conquests in foreign lands. Violent reaction to foreign invasions has become the hallmark of Afghanistan's military history. Such reaction was not limited to the action of state armies and dynastical contingents but was a universal response, albeit fragmented, across a mosaic of tribal and community entities with their own martial capacities. Historically the collapse of the state army and central government has never resulted in the defeat of the nation or full control by invading forces. The people, relying on their decentralized political, economic, and military potential, often took over the fighting against the invaders. Local military potential was also the main source in fighting domestic tribal feuds.

The recent war in Afghanistan (2001–2014) spurred renewed interest in studying the military history of Afghanistan and the Afghans' way of war. The subject is particularly fascinating as the US-led invasion in 2001—in response to the al-Qaeda–linked terrorist attacks in the United States from bases in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan—came a little over a decade after the failure of the Soviet military occupation of this central Asian country. Given this

recent attention, many authors attempted to unveil the secrets of the fierce resistance of the Afghan people to foreign military intervention and typify the Afghans' approaches to war. Many of these studies produced valuable reading. However, in their zeal to find easy and all-inclusive "truths" about the military culture of the Afghans, some analysts hastily presented concepts based on stereotypes, generalizations, anachronistic judgments, and geographic misplacements. Reference to certain clichés, like the designation of Afghanistan as "the graveyard of empires," apparently inspired by a narrow focus on the Anglo-Afghan wars of the nineteenth century and the Soviet experience of the 1980s in Afghanistan, is one of the erroneous deductions. Such conclusions are far from being a comprehensive portrayal of the way of war pursued by both state and nonstate actors in Afghanistan against different domestic and foreign enemies, under changing sociopolitical and technological conditions at different times and different places.

The way of war in Afghanistan has been a far more complex phenomenon than has been epitomized by "The Young British Soldier" chant of Rudyard Kipling,[1] or the narrow understanding of foreign observers of the nineteenth century, whose judgments were subject to their particular experience at a particular time and place in Afghanistan and the Pashtun tribal areas. When Joseph Ferrier suggested that Afghans are born in violence and fighting becomes part of their way of life, he missed the larger picture, where deep-seated mechanisms of making peace coexist with the motives for violence. He characterized the Afghans' mode of war as a bloody act of a parochial nature. "It is rare," he wrote, "to see them make war for the simple purpose of defending their nationality, for this sentiment does not exist and can be considered applicable only to the tribe, its district or encampment."[2] The assessment, even if justified

by the circumstances, is limited in time and space. Or, when Winston Churchill wrote that “except at the times of sowing and of harvest, a continual state of feud and strife prevails throughout the land. . . . Every tribesman has a blood feud with his neighbor. Every man’s hand is against the other, and all against the stranger,”[3] he was reflecting his experience with the Malakand Field Force, an episode of British frontier war in the Pashtun tribal areas of Swat and Dir in 1897 under a particular situation in place and time. The history of the people living in modern Afghanistan did not start with the colonial intervention in Afghanistan but dates back to centuries before, when they experienced different situations and various enemies and embraced diverse beliefs and developed changing perceptions.

In Afghanistan, like everywhere else, people have their distinctive assumptions, perceptions, and preferences that may underpin their way of war. But they transform over time and are subject to ideological, economic, political, and environmental changes. Although for the past thirteen centuries Islam has been an important ideological and cultural element in the Afghans’ approaches to warfare, its implementation has been strongly influenced by political and social conditions. The *ghaza* (fighting for the faith) forays of the Afghans and Turkic warriors in the Middle Ages to spread Islam in India were different from the *ghaza*-motivated battles of the Afghan *ghazis* against the British invasions in the nineteenth century. The popular uprising in Afghanistan against the *Sawr* Revolution, which brought the communists to power in 1978, and the nationwide resistance to the Soviet invasion that was launched in 1979 to bolster the faltering communist regime were initially comparable with that society’s historical models of collective behavior. The resistance was basically a spontaneous defensive action by social communities without any connection to national political organizations. It

was aimed at protecting the community's value system and traditional way of life, which were threatened by an alien ideology and an intolerable state control. But, as the war expanded in space and time, the resistance transformed into a wider struggle involving the decentralized resistance forces, internal and exiled political elites, and international actors. Both the state and the resistance became part of an international conflict waged on the last battlefield of the Cold War. The opposing international actors, with diverging interests in the Afghan conflict, armed and financially supported the conflicting sides in the Afghan war. This made the war far different from what the Afghan society fought against the British invasions in the nineteenth century. Later, the very concept of *Jihad*, which underpinned the struggle of Afghan Muslims against the atheist forces that had occupied their land in the 1980s, proved different from the radical *Jihad* ideology that inspires the suicidal fighters of the Taliban two decades later in their war against the Afghan government and its NATO allies.

The nature of the military forces that emerged and operated on the Afghanistan political scene throughout history has been conditioned by the makeup of the state-society relationship and the dynamics of projecting power within a changing environment. Imperial and dynastic rulers often administered major urban areas and highways through direct control and maintained nominal sovereignty in marginal areas. These included hard-to-reach places and remote tribal societies where they left the local leaders in control. Society remained segmented and immobilized. The lack of integration made the communities, particularly in tribal areas, semi-independent, mostly relying on their own resources and their own traditional institutions. This included local military forces that were mobilized during intertribal conflicts or foreign threats. The tribal militias also could be mustered in support of or against the central

government during domestic disturbances. This nation-in-arms status provided for the rise of local and tribal leaders and nonstate armed groups when the central government collapsed or the state army disintegrated in the face of foreign invasion or dynastic upheavals.

Thus, there were a variety of military institutions created and nurtured by dynasties, empires, tribes, and communities to achieve their distinctive goals and secure their particular interests. From very ancient times, state armies existed, as did public military forces, in areas not fully governed by the state. The state army was the instrument of dynastic power while the public military was part of political and social institutions of tribes and other communities that had to depend on their own resources for local security, which was rarely provided by the sovereign prince. The tribal levies and local militia were also essential for supporting local interests in a volatile and competing environment.

As a result of these patterns, few state armies in premodern Afghanistan have successfully monopolized the use of force. Generally, the state army was not the only military institution within a social system imbued with military pluralism. The rulers usually relied on a smaller standing army of well-trained and loyal soldiers closely linked to them and larger contingents provided by satraps, local governors, and tribal leaders. These contingents gathered when needed to fight rival powers, conquer other lands, and crush domestic rebellions. Meanwhile, a cycle of constant rising and falling of ruling dynasties and the dominance of an unstable security environment reinforced a state of localism in political, social, and military life. While state armies focused on dynastic interests, nonstate local groups and factions with paramilitary capacity emerged to secure local interests and sometimes acted independently as sources of local resistance.

The structure of states, tribes, and social communities in Afghanistan, along with the scope of their controlled space, shaped their mode of fighting throughout history. The state armies, with wider space to maneuver and greater resources, usually fought in a conventional manner, seeking rapid and decisive results. The dynastic wars and foreign conquests were often fought by a combined force of regular and irregular contingents guided by the principles and methods of conventional warfare. The wars initiated by nonstate actors, including tribal and community militias, against foreign invasions or repressive governments were invariably fought by the tactics of irregular warfare. The most effective and sustainable method of irregular combat was an indigenous form of guerrilla war that in strategic terms was different from the one conceptualized by Mao Zedong. The latter form aims at seizing state power through organizing "liberated zones,"[4] while the Afghan model is defensive in nature and tactical in scope. Due to its lack of structural cohesiveness, the irregular warfare model of nonstate Afghan actors had transient impact. Its tactical achievements could hardly develop into strategic and political gains. It was a lengthy war of "a thousand cuts" that could hurt the enemy but was often not capable of exploiting the gains to establish a new political system.

Khoshal Khan Khattak, the renowned seventeenth-century Pashtun national leader and thinker, detailed the guerrilla tactics of the Afghan highlanders:

> The *Qazaqi* [guerrilla] method of warfare is more effective than a pitched battle. *Qazaqi* is enemy killer and protects small forces against a strong enemy. . . . There are two prerequisites for this kind of warfare: good horses (mobility) and good archers (fire power). These two can help a small force defeat a large enemy. . . . No heavy equipment should be carried in *qazaqi* war. . . . When you fight a smaller enemy detachment you should decisively attack with surprise. But, if the enemy receives reinforcement [or] when you encounter a stronger enemy force, avoid decisive engagement and swiftly withdraw only to hit back where the enemy is vulnerable.[5]

It was in such a setting that the tribal warrior felt at home. It was quite a challenge to transform such a fighter into a soldier in a disciplined army ruled by professional ethos and regulated by conventional military norms. A British observer of the Afghan society, Howard Hensman, wrote in 1881:

> The Afghan does not lack native courage, and in hill warfare he is unrivaled, so long as it takes the shape of guerrilla fighting. But once he is asked to sink his identity and to become merely a unit in a battalion, he loses all self-confidence and is apt to think more of getting away than of stubbornly holding his ground as he would have done with his own friends led by his own chief.[6]

The two modes of warfare, regular and irregular, were often used in combination for better results. In the nineteenth century, the military actions of the state army were supported in certain cases by guerrilla-type attacks mounted by tribal fighters in Afghanistan. In 1919 the Afghan military strategy for war was to instigate tribal insurgency and support it by military operations of regular forces—a strategy Pakistan partly emulated in its operation Gibraltar in 1965 during its war with India. Over the centuries, the embracing of the two models of warfare by fighters in Afghanistan facilitated the cross-influence and integration of conventional and guerrilla tactics into a unique way of war. The innovative design transforming the light guns Zanbouraks (Zambouraks)[7] into mobile camel-mounted artillery by the Afghans in Kandahar in the early eighteenth century was inspired by the irregular warfare traditions that emphasized the combination of archery/fire and mobility. The innovation played a key role in the victory of Shah Mahmud Hotak's army over the superior Safavid forces in the fateful battle of Gulnabad in 1722.[8] Forty years later the combination of regular and irregular approaches to war helped the Afghan monarch Ahmad Shah Durrani to decisively defeat the Maratha army in Panipat (1761). A century later Joseph Ferrier dramatized this approach of

combining the tactics of regular and irregular warfare by the Afghan fighters. He wrote: “Before they encounter their adversary . . . they endeavor to weaken him by ruining the country in his front, so that he cannot maintain himself; they burn the villages, expel the inhabitants, and destroy the aqueducts. . . . And after he [the enemy] is panting with thirst and exhausted by hunger, they pounce on their enemy like a tiger and make a horrible massacre.”[9]

Meanwhile, the guerrilla fighters enhanced their effectiveness by integrating modern technology into their culture of warfare and soon became some of the best marksmen in the world. In modern times, the use of new and radical methods has revolutionized the irregular warfare as conducted by transnational insurgents. The war pursued by the Taliban fighters and their associates in Afghanistan in the early twenty-first century is very different from the hit-and-run tactics of the fighters led by Khushal Khan Khattak against the Mughal armies of India in the seventeenth century. It is even different from the guerrilla war waged by the Afghan Mujahedeen against the Soviet invasion in the 1980s. In the new irregular warfare, terrorism is a major instrument of insurgency and insurgency is a means of global terrorism.

In general, Afghanistan’s military history is mostly shaped by three unique features: a distinct geography unsuitable for large invading armies and difficult to sustain logistically; the decentralized sociopolitical order of self-relying local communities; and the multiplicity of military institutions within a social system imbued with military pluralism. Under such a sociopolitical setup, few state armies in the past successfully monopolized the use of force. The state military establishment was mainly involved in protecting the state while local community militias and the people at large defended their land and social values against foreign and

internal incursions. This created a potential to wage thousands of wars in villages and towns when needed.

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1 A Distinct Geography and a Turbulent History

Geography is a defining factor in Afghanistan's military history. The country's location and its topography had a profound impact on the course of events and the nature of military movements in and around the land occupied by today's Afghanistan. Geography has also influenced social and cultural developments in the country with political consequences. Located at the confluence of four main regions in Asia, Afghanistan has been entwined in unrelenting wars and conflicts throughout its turbulent history. Outside conquerors advancing their imperial ambitions, competing regional powers clashing on their geographic edges, and violent reactions by indigenous highlanders to outside incursions kept the people living in Afghanistan in a constant struggle for survival. At times Afghanistan itself became the hub of powerful empires with easy access to neighboring regions for military conquests. It has been the destiny of Afghanistan to serve as a battlefield for imperial ambitions since the dawn of history. Major armies crisscrossed the mountainous country from north to south and from west to east. From Persians and Greeks to Arabs and Mongols to the British and Russians and Americans, all have passed through this rugged land, leaving their imprint on the social and political life of the region.

Throughout the eventful history of Afghanistan, several outsiders have invaded, pillaged the country, and left. There were others who tried to colonize the land and failed. Yet there were also foreigners who settled on the land, adapted to the indigenous culture, and established powerful empires in Afghanistan that straddled the boundaries of central, west, and south Asian regions. Being an ancient focal point of the Silk Road and human migration, Afghanistan became a major crossroad of trade, cultural exchange, and political interactions in Asia. Modern writers identify the country with distinctive epithets: *the graveyard of empires, the Central Asian roundabout*, *the highway of conquest*,and *the crossroad of empires*. The British historian Arnold Toynbee called Afghanistan the eastern roundabout of the old world. In his classification of geographic locations into "roundabouts" and "cul-de-sacs," he identified Afghanistan as a classic example of a roundabout since it has been the link between Southwest Asia, the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia, and Eastern Asia."[1] However, what is more relevant is how the people of Afghanistan refer to their land: *the heart of Asia*. In the words of poet-philosopher Sir Mohammad Iqbal (1877–1938), Asia suffers when the "heart" is in pain.[2]

In Afghanistan, as elsewhere, the geography has not been merely a static space where the time-bound history was played out. The mutability and vicissitudes of history altered the stark reality of geography while the geography, for its part, adjusted the course of history. Political, social, and cultural shifts transfigured the geographic landscape while the geopolitics of regional powers and forces from beyond the region often accentuated the impact of geography on history. Ancient conquerors—whether they came from the north, such as the Aryans (second millennium BC), Kushans (first century AD), Ephthalites (fifth century), and Turks and Mongols (tenth to fifteenth centuries), or ventured from the

West, such as Achaemenids (sixth to fifth centuries BC), Alexander the Great (330–327 BC), and Arabs (seventh to ninth centuries)—all used Afghanistan as the gateway to India. Before the discovery and use of sea routes to India, the subcontinent was well protected in the north by the Himalayan massif and in the south by the sea. Access to the area was mostly limited to major mountain valleys and passes in the west that passed through the hilly terrain of Afghanistan.

In the fifteenth century, with the discovery and use of sea routes by European powers, the gates of India, in the words of Thomas Holdich, became "Watergates" and the way to India was the way of the sea.[3] Sea transport diminished the attraction of previously well-beaten land routes that brought to the subcontinent Aryans from the north and conquerors from the west. Later, with the rise of the so-called gunpowder empires in the region, the Mughal Empire in India looked at Afghanistan as India's gateway to the outside world. Abul Fazl-i-'Allami (1551–1602), the leading court chronicler of the Mughal Emperor Jalaluddin Akbar (1542–1605) wrote that "Kabul and Kandahar are considered two gates of India. The former provides access to Central Asia and the latter to Iran. . . . Both facilitate links to the outside world."[4]

Centuries later, during the ferocious strategic competition among the European powers in Central Asia, British-controlled India was threatened by Napoleonic France and Tsarist Russia. The rush to rediscover the land routes to India through Afghanistan intensified. Once again geography exerted a strong influence on the course of history by defining its consequences. This time Afghanistan became the forward line of defense for the British Indian territories.

The topographic influence of the land has internal and external dimensions. Internally it shapes political and social developments, and externally it creates a formidable barrier

to invasions. More than two-thirds of the land is covered by mountains whose highest peak is over 25,000 feet. The Hindu Kush, the greatest mountain range in Afghanistan, covers the central part of the country. The original appellation of the Hindu Kush in the Avestan language, *Pariyatra Parvata* in Sanskrit, meant a mountain loftier than an eagle's flight. The craggy chain, which emerges in the northeast from the Pamir-Karakorum knot, slopes down to the southwest. The system stretches 966 kilometers (600 miles) laterally with an average altitude of 4,500 meters (14,700 feet). The maximum width of the central mountainous sector from north to south is about 600 kilometers (370 miles) and its median north-south measurement is about 240 kilometers (150 miles). Only about 600 kilometers of the massif is called the Hindu Kush Mountains; the rest consists of numerous smaller mountain ranges branching out in different directions forming a complex of hilly country in central Afghanistan. The major western chains in the system include the Koh-i Baba west of Bamian and the Spin Ghar or Eastern Safed Koh in the east, south of Nangrahar province. Several valleys in the eastern branches of the central massif offer access routes to the east, including the legendary Khyber Pass road. Further south, the Suleiman range, in the southeastern provinces of greater Paktia, is bisected by the valleys of Kurram, Tochi, and Gomal, which were historically used as conquest routes to India. In the west, numerous ranges create the western mountain hedge of the central massif, covering the eastern edges of the plains stretching from Badghis in the north to Farah in the south. These ranges include the Siah Koh, Koh-e Khwajah Mohammad, Tirband-e-Turkistan, the western Safed Koh, and the Doshakh commonly referred to as the Paropamisus.

Numerous high passes transect the mountains, forming a strategically important network of transit routes. Not all

passes have military significance, as most of the higher northeastern passes only offer limited seasonal access. Further down in the southeast, one of the well-traveled ancient routes runs through the Khawak Pass (10,000 to 12,000 feet) in upper Panjsher Valley. This was used 2,300 years ago by Alexander the Great to get his 50,000 to 60,000 troops across the massif in two weeks. Another well-trodden historical passage is a circuitous route along the Ghorband Valley and through the Shebar Pass (9,800 feet) that skirts the high peaks and opens onto the northern plains in the Baghlan Province. The most important mountain pass today is the Salang Tunnel (11,200 feet), which was built in 1964 and links Kabul and points south of it to northern Afghanistan. The tunnel gained renewed significance during recent foreign military interventions in Afghanistan. In the 1980s the Salang highway became the main supply route for the Soviet occupation forces in Afghanistan. Most recently, as the US-led NATO forces in Afghanistan faced political obstacles in using the southern supply route through Pakistan, they decided to increase the use of an alternate supply route from Central Asia through the Salang Tunnel. Military traffic congested the Salang Pass by increasing its original capacity 10 times. It was designed to support only 1,000 vehicles per day. The passes of the Paropamisus in the west are relatively low, averaging around 600 meters; the best known of these is the Sabzak Pass between Herat and Badghis provinces, which links the western and northwestern parts of Afghanistan.

The Hindu Kush has a major impact on the climate and hydrography of Afghanistan. Mountain ranges verging on the southern and southeastern borders create a barrier that blocks moisture flowing from the Indian Ocean across the Indian subcontinent. Only some eastern valleys of Afghanistan down to Laghman lie on the fringe of the Indian summer monsoon that causes forestation of various

densities to grow at certain elevations. The north and northwest sides of the mountains receive less rain, which falls mainly in the winter and spring. The inner valleys of the Hindu Kush are arid and have desert vegetation except for shrubs along rivers and streams. The distinct climate influences the political, social, and economic development of the land. Communities are isolated by geography and climate. The average annual precipitation is 313 mm (12 inches)—one third of the world average. Scarcity of water has forced people to live where water is available, spreading people over widely separated small areas. The distance and remoteness of habitable areas had long limited contact between people and force local communities to become self-reliant. The impulse of self-reliance drives the societies to limit themselves to sustenance economy with little prospect for surplus production to be marketed elsewhere.

The Hindu Kush influence parallels the effect of the Alps in Central Europe. Both massifs have often defined political and cultural frontiers between communities living on opposite sides of the highland. The Hindu Kush marks a cultural watershed between northern and southern expanses in the region, with the north having closer cultural affinities with Central Asia and the south with the Indian subcontinent and Iran. This is similar to one of the great cultural frontiers of Europe between the cultural sphere of Mediterranean and the transalpine cultures to the north drawn by the Eastern Alps. Both chains are identified with great conquerors who successfully led massive armies across the rugged mountain passes. The feat of Alexander the Great, who crossed the Hindu Kush in the cold weather of the early spring of 329 BC, has been as exalted by military historians as Hannibal’s passage through the Alps in the late fall of 218 BC.

The Hindu Kush mountain chain has exerted exceptional sway over events in Central and South Asia. The intertwined

mountain ridges channeled military columns and commercial caravans through distinct tracts and corridors. The restrictions affected all kind of traffic moving from west to east and from north to south and produced two distinctive patterns. In the first pattern, large movements from the west heading east were forced to branch off to the north and south of the central massif. The northern branches were directed toward northern Afghanistan (ancient Bactria) and the trans-Oxus region. The southern branch moved through Sistan and Kandahar to Sind and southern India or through Kabul and the Khyber Pass to Northern India. The two divergent axes occasionally converged and linked up at the north-south passes of the Hindu Kush.

The Geopolitics of a Peripheral Status

The territory of today's Afghanistan straddles the geographic boundaries of three main regions. It encompasses the converging space and dividing verges of Central Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia with historical connections to China. Its identity as a state is based less on geography and more on history. Throughout its long history the country has served as the buffer between expanding empires or the collision space between competing regional powers.

Afghanistan contains the key strategic lands of the ancient Ariana, an extensive geographic area between Persia and the Indian Subcontinent. Ariana means the "land of Aryans" and has its roots in Zoroastrianism's Avesta. It is also believed that the designation is the Greek name for greater Iran, which covered a far wider expanse than today's Iran—the name adopted for Persia by the Pahlavi dynasty in 1935. The limits of Ariana are not exactly defined by ancient geographers. Ariana is not mentioned by the Greek historian

Herodotus (484–425 BC) or the geographer Ptolemy (90–168 AD). The Greek geographer Eratosthenes (276–194 BC), known for being the inventor of the first map of the world based on the available geographic knowledge of his time, identifies a large territory named Ariana, which he places between Mesopotamia and India. He defined the Indus River as the eastern border of Ariana while it was bounded to the north by what he called the Tauros Mountains.[5] The southern border of Eratosthenes's Ariana was formed by the sea while its western limits included the lands between Carmania and the Caspian Sea.[6] But Eratosthenes noted that the name Ariana was extended to a certain part of Persia and Media as well as to the Bactria and Soghdiana to the north, who speak roughly the same language.[7] Later, the prominent Greek geographer Strabo (64 BC–24 AD) and the Roman author Pliny (23–78 AD) defined the boundaries of Ariana with certain clarity.[8] Strabo describes its eastern boundary as the River Indus and its southern boundary as the Indian Ocean from the mouth of the Indus to the Persian Gulf. The western limit of Ariana is identified in two different ways: in one case it is marked by a line drawn between the Caspian Sea to Carmania (Kerman), and in another case the boundary is described as a line separating Parthia from Media and Carmania from Persia that includes the whole of Yazd and Kerman but excludes Fars.[9] The northern boundary is the Paropamisus Mountains (Hindu Kush), which is the continuation of the massif that forms the northern limit of India. However, Strabo includes some of the eastern Persians, the Bactrians, and Sogdians as part of the people of Ariana living in the north of the mountains apparently because of the affinity of their language. Therefore, Ariana is said to have comprised the provinces of Parthia (the country between Herat and the Caspian), Aria (Herat), Carmania (Kerman), Bactria (Balkh), Margiana (Murgab-Merv), Hyrcania (Gorgan), Drangiana (Sistan), Gedrosia

(Makran), Arachosia (greater Kandahar), and Paropamisus Mountain (Hindu Kush).[10] This includes the eastern extremities of the Iranian plateau, the entire modern-day Afghanistan, the east and south of Iran, Tajikistan, parts of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and northwestern Pakistan.

During the Islamic period Afghanistan was the essential part of Khorasan, a variously defined area located east and northeast of the Kevir Desert in eastern Iran, covering northern Afghanistan and parts of Central Asia. The space has been defined in terms of geography, administrative divisions, and cultural affinities of the people living there. Geographically, Khorasan covered the area bounded by the Oxus River to the north, the Kevir Desert in central-eastern Persia to the west, and the Hindu Kush Mountain to the south. It was an area with four main provincial centers: Balkh, Merv, Herat, and Nishapur. Administratively Khorasan boundaries surpassed its geographic space and extended to the north to Transoxiana between the Oxus and Jaxartes rivers, with Samarkand and Bukhara its major cities, and to the south to the area south of Hindu Kush encompassing Sistan, Zabulistan, and Kabulistan, which geographically was considered the Indian borderland.[11] Culturally, Khorasan covered an even larger area where the inhabitants shared distinctive cultural affinities and that extended from eastern Persia to the Indus River. It was in this context that Babur wrote in the early sixteenth century that “just as Arabs call every place outside Arab (Arabia) *Ajam*, so Hindustanis call every place outside Hindustan, Khorasan. There are two trade-marts on the land routes between Hindustan and Khorasan; one is Kabul, the other Qandahar. To Kabul caravans come from Kashghar, Ferghana, Turkistan, Samarkand, Bukhara, Balkh, Hissar, and Badakhshan. To Qandahar, they come from Khorasan.”[12]

Afghanistan (the land of the Afghans) is the modern name of the country internationally identified since the eighteenth

century when Ahmad Shah Durrani, a Pashtun leader of the Abdali tribal confederation, founded the Afghan empire and unified the territories between the Oxus and the Indus Rivers into a multiethnic state. However, centuries before Afghanistan became a state with a political identity, it was a geographic designation of the land where the Afghan (Pashtun) tribes were settled from ancient times. Historically the name “Afghan” mainly designated the Pashtun people, which is the largest ethnic group in modern Afghanistan.

Afghans as a distinct people were mentioned as *Abagan* and *Apakan* in the third-century inscription of the Naqsh-i-Rustam temple in Shiraz, Iran, engraved during the rule of the Sassanid emperors Shahpur I (242–272) and Shahpur III (309–379).[13]

In a sixth-century study titled *Brhat-Samhita*, written by the Indian astronomer Varaha Mihira, Avagana (Afghana) as a people and as a land are recorded in several passages.[14]

A century later, the Chinese pilgrim Hieun-Tsang, who traveled in South and Central Asia in the years 629–645, indicated that on his return journey from India, after crossing the Indus in the modern Sind province, he traveled northwest across the mountainous territory to what he called A-Po-Kan (Afghan) and from there he traveled northwest to Tsao-Ka-Pa (Arachosia) or Tsao-Li (Zawoli?) with its capital named Ho-Si-Na (Ghazna). It seems the territory had encompassed the Gomal Valley and the Afghan Paktia and Paktika provinces extending to Ghazni (Ho-Si-Na), Zabul, and Kandahar. Then he turned north to the Kabul Valley and traveled across the Hindu Kush through the Khawak Pass to Andarab.[15] Further, in a description of the countries in the region, Hieun-Tsang records a mountainous principality of “In-Po-Kien” or “A-Po-Kien” located about 200 *li* (about 100 kilometers) southeast of Badasthana (here meaning Badakhshan).[16]

The tenth-century anonymous Muslim author of *Hudud al-'Alam* speaks, in several passages, of a people called Afghans who lived near Gardez and in the Nangrahar area.[17] Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (973–1048), an eleventh-century Muslim scholar and polymath, referred to the Afghans as people of various tribes living in the western frontier mountains of the Indus River,[18] while the fourteenth-century Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta, who visited the region in 1333, wrote that Afghans are living even in Kabul and "they hold mountains and defiles and possess considerable strength and are mostly highwaymen. Their principle mountain is called Koh Suleiman [Suleiman Mountain]."[19]

Afghanistan as a geographic name has been cited in Islamic sources at least since the fourteenth century.[20] This area has been defined as the territories between the Indus River and the Hindu Kush Mountains with its center at the Suleiman Mountains in the southeast of modern Afghanistan. In the sixteenth century, Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire in India, and his descendants referred to the traditional ethnic Pashtun territories between the Hindu Kush Mountains and the Indus River. In the nineteenth century, Afghanistan rulers adopted the name Afghanistan for the entire Afghan Empire after it was used in various treaties between British India and the Qajarid dynasty of Persia. Afghanistan as the official name of the state was internationally recognized before it was commonly used in all parts of the country. According to the nineteenth-century British author Henry Bellew, Afghanistan was understood as a land bounded on the east by the Indus River from Gilgit to the Indian Sea, on the south by the Arabian Sea, on the west by the Persian Kerman and Khorasan, and on the north by the Oxus River (Amu Darya). "The name Afghanistan, as applied to the region thus defined," he wrote, "is not commonly known, or so used by the people of the country itself, either in whole or in part. It is the name given to the

whole region in a general way by its neighbors and by foreigners from the appellation of the dominant people inhabiting the country and appears to have originated with the Persians in modern times only."[21] Actually, the recognition of Afghanistan as the name of the state is rooted in the unification of the territories between the Oxus and Indus under the Durrani Empire in the middle of the eighteenth century.

In modern times Afghanistan has been variably described as part of South Asia, Central Asia, and even the Middle East. In reality the country overlaps the boundaries of all these regions and is thus part of each one. It represents one of the definite geopolitical fault lines in the world and is constantly exposed to the dynamics of changing geopolitics in the region. Afghanistan has had open borders with the regional states that rose to power in the course of history in Central Asia, Persia, and India. This placed Afghanistan between these three regions. This peripheral status has been characterized by two unique attributes from the past. On the one hand, it often turned Afghanistan into the battlefield of competing regional powers that clashed on their geographic edges. On the other hand, this outlying position contributed to weaker control by the imperial centers and helped the land to become independent as their central influence declined. Further, the people of modern Afghanistan were not passive spectators but often fought the invaders and took advantage of their unique location to invade adjacent lands in Central Asia, India, and Persia, which resulted in the establishment of vast empires centered in today's territory of Afghanistan.

During the Islamic era, Afghanistan evolved into one of the main centers of the Muslim world and a cradle of Islamic civilizations. Using Islam as the religion of power, local dynasties (Safarids, Samanids, Ghaznavids, and Ghorids) expanded their power into Central Asia and India in the

tenth through twelfth centuries and Islamized many non-Muslim areas in the region. The Mongol and Turks' invasions in the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries forced Afghanistan once again into a peripheral state, first between the Chaghatay khanate of Central Asia and the Ilkhanids of Iran and later between the Mughal Empire of India, the Safavids of Iran, and the Uzbek khanate of Central Asia. In the second half of the eighteenth century, Ahmad Shah Durrani, the founder of modern Afghanistan, restored the centrality of regional power to Afghanistan by establishing the control of government over all of present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, and parts of eastern Iran and stretched the rule of the empire to northern India as far as Delhi. But in the nineteenth century, the Afghan Empire came under threat first by the Persians in the west and the Sikhs in the east and later by the European imperial powers. The "Great Game" competition between the British and Russian empires over control of Central Asia turned Afghanistan first into a battleground and then into a "buffer state" blocking military clashes between imperial Russia and British India. Afghanistan played that role but was forced to fight both powers as the last century wore on. Mostly untouched by the two world wars, the Afghanistan political scene during the past 40 years has been dominated by violence fueled by opposing ideologies and competing political interests. The country, which served as the last battlefield of the Cold War at the end of the twentieth century, became the scene of the first global war on terrorism at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Consequently the military history of Afghanistan is strongly influenced by the dynamics of its peripheral status between major regional centers of power and the impact of its location on the geopolitical fault line astride South, Central, and West Asia. The history of Afghanistan in general and its military history in particular should be studied in this

context. Given the varying geohistorical features of these regions, strategic opportunities opened to Afghanistan and its vulnerabilities to outside powers have been of a varying, divergent, and changing nature. Historically Afghanistan has been vulnerable to invasions from the north and impervious to attacks from the east. The situation forced Afghanistan to defend in the north and take advantage of its favored geographic position in the east to overrun areas in the Indian subcontinent. To the west, the military situation changed by shifts in the balance of power within the greater Iranian plateau.

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2 Highlights of the Past

From Antiquity to the Emergence of Modern Afghanistan in 1747

There is little accurate knowledge about the early history of the people living in today's Afghanistan. There are stories mentioned in Sassanid accounts and later Islamic-era sources that describe early dynasties that ruled thousands of years ago in Balkh over a vast area covering northern and southern Afghanistan and beyond. These dynasties are mostly wrapped in myths and legends and some factual history. What is known can be traced to the oral traditions related to Avestan figures in northeastern Iran centered in Bactria (Balkh). Some of the studies of the early history of the region are referenced in religious scriptures of the Indo-Iranian people who migrated in successive waves from their original abode between the Aral and Caspian Seas to the Iranian plateau and to other lands in the early second millennium BC. Some initial waves of these migrating Arians or Aryans moved south through Herat and across the Hindu Kush Mountains to the valleys of the Helmand and Kabul Rivers. The subsequent waves of the migrants apparently moved in two streams spreading over the lands east and west of the Carmanian desert. The Eastern stream settled in Soghdiana, Bactria (Bakhtar, Balkh), Carmania (Kerman), Margiana (Murghab, Merv), and Aria (Herat) and drove their

Aryan kinsmen into India. The saga of these eastward migrants, identified as Aryans, is detailed in the Vedic scriptures, which are a collection of religious teachings and hymns written over several centuries covering the period of migration from the Hindu-Kush and Helmand regions down to the Ganges plains.[1] The western stream, whose foremost tribe was the Persians, headed west of the central Iranian desert followed by the Medes, from whom the Indo-Germanic settlers in Phrygia and Armenia are said to have been offshoots.[2]

The immigrants who settled in Bactria,[3] a land between the Hindu Kush Mountains and the Oxus River, became the most powerful people in the region and established the East Iranian civilization, which lasted for hundreds of years. With its fertile soil and well-watered land, the country prospered and extended its influence to both sides of the Hindu Kush and across the Oxus River to Soghdiana. Bounded mostly by natural barriers of mountains in the east and south and the Kevir Desert in the west, Bactria was a distinctive geographic body and often an independent political entity for over a thousand years. Its crossroad location between West, Central, and South Asia made it a major trade center of the old world. As Holdich notes, from ancient times and an unknown beginning Bactria and Babylon must have been the two great commercial centers of Asia.[4]

The Epic Age

At the time when their Persian and Medes kinsmen in the western extremities of the Iranian plateau were dominated and constrained by their powerful neighbors, the eastern Iranian people centered in Bactria were drawn into constant wars with the invading Turanian nomads attacking from the Central Asian steppes. The exploits of this period of history and the feats of larger-than-life heroes of an epic age are

manifested in the Avestan texts and reflected in the epic narratives of Firdausi's *Shah-Nama* (Book of Kings) and other traditions. It was here that Avesta, the primary collection of the sacred texts of Zoroastrianism, originated. The term "Avestan people" refers to the peoples linked to the Zoroastrian religion and culture settled in the Eastern Iranian Plateau. As Geiger suggests, the country in which the civilization of the Avestan people arose was really eastern Iran, which encompasses modern Afghanistan territory. According to Avesta, of the sixteen chosen territories created by *Ahura Mazda* more than half were located in today's Afghanistan and four others in its immediate vicinity.[5] It is a civilization of great antiquity and dates back at least to a time before the Median and Persian kings.[6] Thus the Susiana (modern Shush in Iran) and Persia were outside the pale of the Avestan people.[7] The territories inhabited by the Avestan people are identified as the "land of the Aryans," whose inhabitants shared common race, language, and descent. The name corresponds with Strabo's Ariana, which embraces the eastern provinces, and which was the original home of the Iranian race, as well as modern Iran. Strabo (64 BC–24 AD) called Bactria "the pride of Ariana."[8]

The early military history of the land known to classic writers as ancient Ariana is linked to three sets of constant struggle between rival forces:

- the struggle between migrating hordes and the natives;
- the war of settled communities against the nomads;
- the strife between the religious followers and the unbelievers.

Clashes between the invading immigrants and the natives who were displaced by the newcomers continued over hundreds of years. The natives did not give up their land without a struggle. It was a racial and cultural war. The

Aryans considered the non-Aryans primitive, evil, and even souls degenerated into demon souls,[9] and they fought them under the leadership of mythical heroic figures glorified in the lengthy epic poem *Shah-Nama*. The colonizing struggles were presumably waged in very ancient times when the first immigration of the Aryan tribes took place and the invading hordes subjugated the primitive inhabitants of Iranian highlands.

The second set of conflicts was waged by the settled societies against the invading Scythian nomads who were descending from the depth of their Central Asian steppes across the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya) onto villages and towns of Bactria and Soghdiana, and then swiftly returning to their barely accessible northern plains.

The third set of conflicts was linked to religious differences. The early Aryans worshiped the elements. The sacred fire, air, water, the sky, the sacred plant and drink of *Soma*, and the soil were revered and often linked to certain deities. Later, religious beliefs developed in different ways as people moved farther apart and cultures separated and evolved. Among the Aryans in the east the conflict was between the people of faith and the unbelievers. The appearance of the prophet Zarathushtra Spitama (Greek Zoroaster) in Bactria, most likely in the middle of the second millennium BC, ushered in a major religious reform that led to the emergence of a new religion known as Zoroastrianism. Meanwhile there were many instances when the Indo-Iranian people were forced to fight over land disputes or to settle a score. In the east, the Battle of the Ten Kings described in Rigveda refers to infighting among different Aryan tribes and kingdoms.[10]

In such a pugnacious environment the peace of settled communities was constantly under threat from within and without. The situation that lasted many centuries could be described as a state of tenuous peace. Like all inhabitants of

borderlands, the people living on the Eastern Iranian Plateau were intermittently at war and had to be constantly watchful and ready to take military action against various threats. Under the prevailing sociopolitical conditions, local communities relied on their innate military capacity to respond to enemy attacks in their space. This made the early centuries an epic era dramatized in the epic literature of later times. What can be gleaned from a collection of Sassanid and later sources and traditions is that from the second millennium BC the current territory of Afghanistan was part of a powerful confederacy in eastern Iran, of which Bactra (Balkh) was the center. It was dominated by an influential aristocracy that enjoyed local autonomy in different provinces around the Hindu Kush.

The Rise of Achaemenids (550 BC)

In the seventh century BC the decline of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (934–609 BC) pened the way for the western Iranian people to break away from the Assyrian yoke and form a united Median-Persian kingdom. With the eventual fall of Nineveh, two new nations, Median and Babylon, became the dominant powers in West Asia. Subsequently, as Babylon expanded toward the Levant and Egypt, the Medians swept across Asia Minor and brought Lidia under its sway. About a century later both the Lydian and Babylon kingdoms were incorporated into a new imperial expanse—the Achaemenid Empire. Cyrus the Great (reigned 559–530 BC), the leader of the Achaemenid house of the Persians, overthrew the Median Confederation and eventually ruled over significant portions of the ancient world, which around 500 BC stretched from the Indus Valley in the east to the northeastern border of Greece.

The territory of modern Afghanistan was part of seven satrapies of the Achaemenid Empire: Bactria (Balkh); Margiana (Murghab District in Afghanistan and Marv in

Turkmenistan); Aria (Herat); Drangiana (southern and southwestern Afghanistan); Arachosia (Kandahar, Lashkargah, and Quetta); Sattagydia (Ghazni); and Gandhara (Kabul, Nangrahar, Peshawar). The main Achaemenid city in the north of Afghanistan was Bactra or Baktra (present-day Balkh).

Bactria, the cradle of ancient Iranian civilization, figured prominently in the center-periphery relationship throughout the Achaemenid period for several reasons. First, Bactria was the ancient settlement and presumed birthplace of Zoroastrianism. Second, the distance of eastern provinces from the center of the empire in western Iran, along with the focus of imperial expansion into West Asia, Europe, and Egypt, allowed Bactria to drift away from the center. Third, Bactria was the front-line province and faced the constant raids of the Scythian nomads from across the Jaxartes.

By the time Alexander the Great invaded Persia in 334 BC, the might of the Achaemenid Empire under Darius III had long declined from its zenith under Darius I (r. 522–486 BC) and his successor Xerxes (r. 486–465 BC). The regression caused a gradual decay in morale and the professional prowess of the imperial army that increasingly depended on hired mercenaries. Xenophon (430–354 BC) considered the Persian soldiers of later times far softer than those who fought under Cyrus the Great. “In the time of Cyrus,” he wrote, the Persian soldiers “clung to Persian self-restraint” but over time they became soft and more interested in luxury and easy life. He asserted that Cyrus trained fighters to close with an enemy and awarded them accordingly. “The generals of today,” he wrote, “flatter themselves that untrained men will serve quite as well as trained. Now none of them will take the field without Hellenes to help them . . . . The Persians of today are less religious, less dutiful to their kindred, less just toward other men, and less valiant in war.”[11]

The Passage of Alexander the Great (330–327 BC)

Alexander's invasion of the lands occupied by today's Afghanistan came as the continuation of the Macedonian conquest of the Persian Empire. However, once the Macedonian armies defeated the Achaemenid imperial military machine and continued their conquest to the east, the nature of warfare drastically changed. Alexander crushed the military might of the Persian Empire in three historical encounters: the Battle of Granicus (April 334 BC), the Battle of Issus (November 333 BC), and the Battle of Gaugamela (October 331 BC). But as he led his army into Hindu Kush, Bactria, and Central Asia, his conventional military power became engaged in numerous native wars in the most difficult terrain and a climate inhospitable to outside intruders. The historian Benjamin Ide Wheeler notes that Alexander had overrun Syria, Persia, Media, and Parthia, a domain 1,000 miles in width, in a single year (July 331–July 330 BC) and that it took him over two years (April 329–May 327 BC) to win submission of a district 350 square miles (Bactria and Soghdiana).[12]

At Issus and Gaugamela the Persian soldiers were fighting a king's war while in Aria (Herat), Bactria, and Soghdiana people were fighting for their homes, their religion, and their traditions against foreign aggression. The area was the very cradle of Zoroaster's teachings. This was the toughest resistance Alexander had encountered since entering Asia. The people he faced were devotedly attached to their homes and were untainted by the luxury and easy lifestyle of their kinsmen in the west. The Macedonian Phalanx and Greek Hoplites found themselves caught up fighting in local villages and towns. There were no major armies to engage in pitched battles, but rather widespread guerrilla activity and fortified defenses in mountainous fortresses and strongholds. The

Macedonian military was not ready for this type of warfare and had to make structural and tactical adjustment in dealing with the native forces.

The Battle of Gaugamela dealt a decisive blow to the military might of the Persians. Alexander began the final pursuit of Darius, who intended to move to the eastern extremities of his empire and face the Macedonian invaders in a more difficult terrain. However, the area around the Hindu Kush Mountains, particularly in Bactria and Soghdiana, was no longer under the control of Persepolis. The most powerful regional leader was Bessus, the viceroy of Bactria. He, in alliance with Satibarzanes, the governors of Aria (Herat) and Barsaentes, the satrap of Drangiana, and Arachosia (Sistan and greater Kandahar), intended to defend their countries against the invasion. They had provided military contingents and fought gallantly with Darius in his battles with Alexander, but they were not impressed by the mild and weak Persian king. It was for this reason that when Darius was on the run, Nabarzanes, the general of the regal guards, suggested that Darius abdicate in favor of Bessus, the ruler of Bactria.[13] Predictably, Darius not only objected to the proposition but also labeled it as treason. But Darius was losing control. His small force was being thinned by daily desertion while most of those who remained were the contingents of the still unconquered territories, Bactria, Arachosia, and Drangiana, under the orders of their respective satraps.

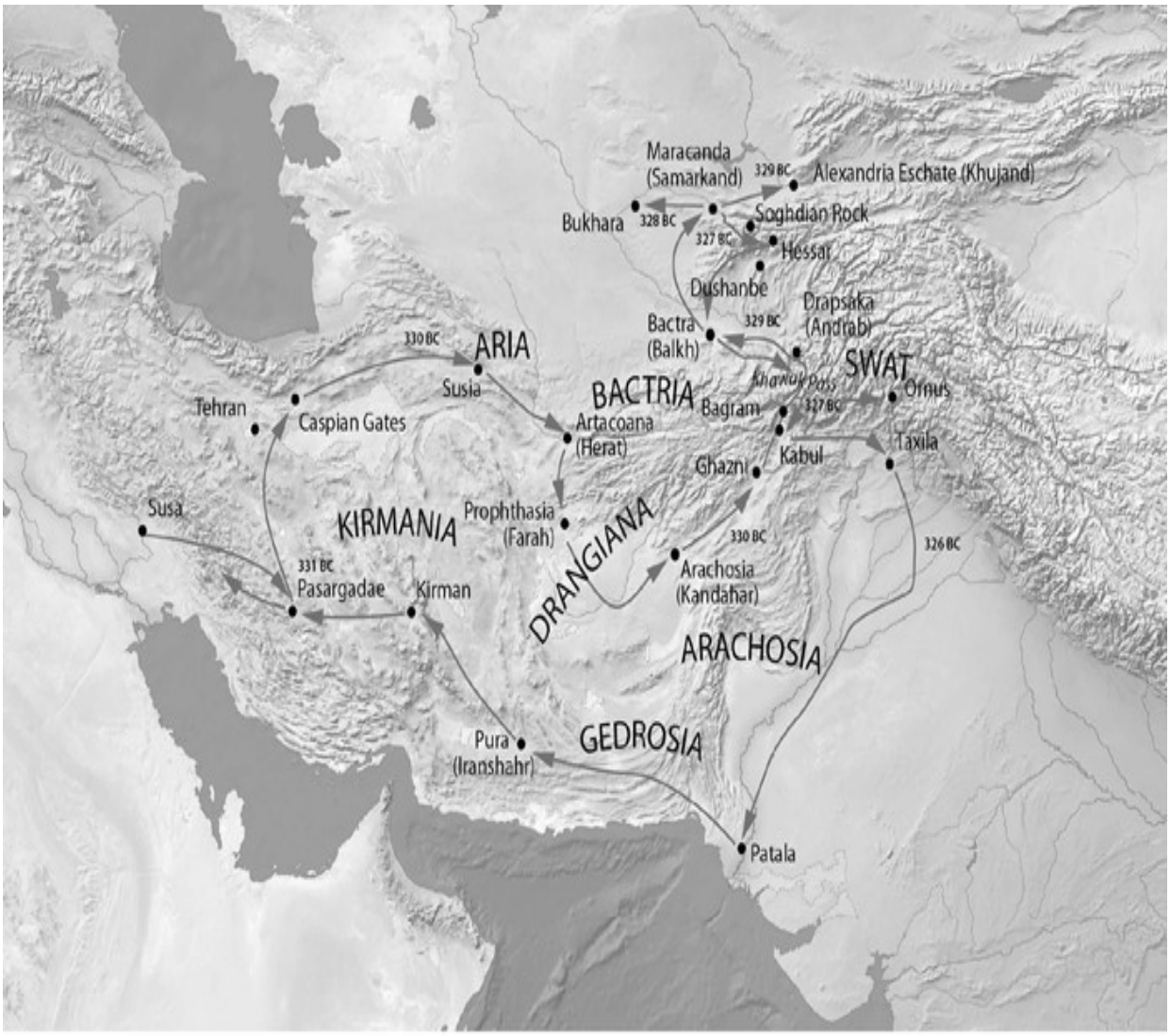
Learning that Bessus and his allies intended to get rid of Darius, Alexander hastened to overtake their retreating columns. Taking a shortcut through a waterless desert while covering 45 miles in one day and night, Alexander neared the column. Seeing that Alexander was so close, Bessus killed Darius and disappeared in the desert, heading to Bactria beyond Alexander’s immediate reach. Many of Alexander’s soldiers thought that the death of Darius marked the end of the conquest of Persia. But for Alexander the job

was not finished: the eastern half of the empire was untouched by his expedition; the defiant satraps of the east were not defeated or subdued; and Bessus, a distant cousin of Darius, proclaimed himself king, and assumed the name of Artaxerxes the Fifth. Also, Alexander had far greater ambitions than conquering Persia. He aspired to surpass the feats of ancient conquerors such as Cyrus the Great and legendary heroes and divinities like Heracles and Dionysus. Alexander also dreamed of reaching the notional "eastern ocean" beyond India.[14] So when a rumor spread throughout the camp that the expedition had reached its end and their king had decided on an immediate return to Macedonia, Alexander took immediate action to dispel this notion. He addressed his soldiers in a passionate speech urging them to follow him in still greater conquests.[15]

The Peaks of the Hindu Kush and the Fire of Bactria

In the summer of 330 BC, Alexander set out on his long march to Bactria with an army of nearly 50,000 mixed force. He took the main caravan route, which runs through Susia (Tus), Aria (Herat), and Merv to Bactria. The distance between the Caspian Gates and Aria, according to Strabo, was approximately 730 miles.[16] But while the Macedonian army was toiling toward Bactria, Satibarzanes, the satrap of Aria (Herat), who had earlier pretended submission at Susia, revolted and massacred the Macedonian small contingent based in Artacoana (the capital of Aria), which was located in today's Herat. Hearing the news of revolt, Alexander immediately turned in his tracks, left Craterus in command of the army, took a fast-moving detachment of lightly armed foot and cavalry,[17] and marched with all speed against Satibarzanes and the Arians, reaching Herat after covering some 75 miles in two days. Although the Greeks defeated

the Arians and drove out Satibarzanes temporarily, the experience impelled Alexander to change his advance route. Instead of resuming his march along the northern route, he moved south, where Bessus’s other allies had the potential to resist. True to his invariable habit of leaving no unbeaten enemy on the flanks of his march, he decided to take a circuitous route to Bactria through Drangiana (Sistan), Arachosia (Kandahar), Ortospana (Kabul), and the Paropamisus Mountains (Hindu Kush) to Bactra (Balkh). The length of this route, over 1,200 miles, was three times greater than the northern route to Bactria, which was 418 miles.



Alexander the Great’s Conquest Route.

The march across southern Afghanistan and over the Hindu Kush Mountains to Bactria was mostly not resisted as the army was moving along the main road. The resurgence of Satibarzanes in Herat was dealt with by a creek detachment sent by Alexander when he was on the banks of the Helmand River. Alexander built security forts (Alexandrias) to secure his lines of communications at different locations along the way and kept filling the gaps in his army by reinforcements from Greece and local recruitment. After reaching the foothills of the Hindu Kush, Alexander constructed a military

fort known as Alexandria ad Caucasum (Alexandria by the Caucasus) near Bagram to secure the passage of the army across the majestic mountain. In the spring of 329 BC, when the Hindu Kush became passable, Alexander began his most stupendous march through the Panjsher Valley and the Khawak Pass, across the precipitous gorges and along the snowy paths of the mountain. The estimated 50,000 men of the Macedonian army took 17 days to cross the mountain while it suffered from severe weather and a lack of supplies.[18] The Macedonian conquerer captured Bactra (Balkh) in summer of 329 BC without opposition.

Bessus failed to make use of the time he had to make necessary preparations to confront Alexander. After the death of Darius most leaders in the east looked to him as the king who could stand up against the European invaders. But he squandered the opportunity to mobilize his army of Bactrian mounted bowmen and fight the Greeks. Long expecting that Alexander would bypass Bactria and march to India, he suddenly saw him in the early summer of 329 BC at the gates of his capital. Bessus fled north across the Oxus in the hope of getting a better chance to face the enemy, which he never found. The conqueror pursued him while overcoming all geographic and climatic hurdles to get his large army across the Oxus to Soghdiana. Greek writers say that Alexander crossed the river in five days on skin-tents stuffed with straw. It is likely that he crossed at Kilif, a traditional crossing point located at the shortest distance between Bactra (Balkh) and Maracanda (Samarkand), which was Alexander's next destination. Arrian wrote that the width of the river at the crossing point was about 1,200 meters.[19]

Bessus's indecisiveness cost him the support of local leaders, who decided to fight the invaders in their way. Left by his supporters, Bessus became a captive in the hands of the conqueror and was publicly humiliated and later executed in Ecbatana (Hamadan). Destiny caught up with

Bessus as he fell victim to the same kind of conspiracy that he had concocted against Darius more than a year before.

The Walled Villages and Ghost Fighters

In the villages and towns of Bactria and Soghdiana, on both sides of the Oxus River and up to the Jaxartes, the local forces, led by their national leaders, resorted to two modes of resistance: defensive battle behind the walls of their fortified villages and cities; and guerrilla warfare. In many cases these forts were almost impregnable to frontal assaults and could exhaust the fighting resources of invaders such as Alexander the Great. Strabo offers a detailed account of the area's strongholds.[20] The uprising was also fueled by religious feelings as the invaders showed hostility toward Zoroastrianism, the dominant religion of Bactria and Soghdiana. Alexander banned the local burial customs; his army ransacked libraries and temples and destroyed or desecrated the Avesta books. The Greek writers are quiet about the persecution of the Iranian religion, but Persian sources are vocal about it and speak of the conqueror as the *Gazeshte Alexander*, which means "Alexander the Accursed."[21]

During the next two years, the Macedonians were faced with a different kind of warfare. The enemy refused decisive engagements but exploited the strengths of their local ways of fighting. Using hit-and-run guerrilla tactics, they avoided pitched battles with the Macedonian heavy armor but kept the Macedonians on the move and off balance by dispersing their forces across the whole of the theater of war. The resistance leaders never concentrated their forces in numbers sufficient for Alexander to pin them down and destroy them. Instead they launched swift raids on isolated garrisons, baggage and supply convoys, and vulnerable detachments. The guerrillas often ambushed and harassed

Macedonian columns sent out to rescue beleaguered outposts. Although Alexander seized control of major Bactrian and Soghdian towns, including Bactra (Balkh), the center of Bactria, and Maracanda (Samarkand), the capital of Soghdiana, and fought off the Scythians on the banks of the Jaxartes River—where he built Alexandria Eschate (Alexandria the Ultimate)—he was constantly on the move to quell recurring uprisings.

Early in the spring of 327 BC, Alexander marched eastward for a final campaign in the hills of Paraetacene (modern Tajikistan, which was the heart of native opposition in the east). It is the mountainous country between the upper courses of the Oxus and the Jaxartes (Syr Darya) Rivers, including the hilly district now known as Hissar, southwest of Tajikistan capital Dushanbe. First Alexander moved to capture the famous Soghdian Rock fortress. According to Arrian the fort rose vertically on every side while the snow-covered surroundings added to its unassailability.[22] After reducing the lofty fortress, Alexander met a Bactrian princess, Roxana (or Roshanak), whose beauty and charms, according to Greek chroniclers, so fascinated Alexander that he fell in love with her, married her, and made her his queen, in spite of the disapproval of his friends.[23] Another astounding mountain fortress no less formidable than the Soghdian Rock was identified as the Rock of Sysimithres.[24] Its location is believed to be the narrow pass at the river Wakhsh, which is located on the road between Hissar and Badakhshan. It took the Macedonians a great deal of preparation, including building access to the bottom of the fort, to force the defenders to sue for peace.

In the summer of 327 BC, after leaving 3,500 cavalry and 10,000 infantry troops under Amyntas in Bactria,[25] Alexander set out on his Indian conquest at the head of 120,000 foot and 15,000 horse, which included at least 70,000 Asiatic troops.[26] Given the logistical difficulties of

maintaining and moving such a large force through an inhospitable land under tough climatic conditions, it appears that the actual size of the troops may have been far less than the inflated numbers suggested by the Greek chroniclers of the Alexander conquest. Alexander recrossed the Hindu Kush through the Khawak Pass in 10 days and camped at the city of Alexandria ad Caucasus, which he had founded south of the pass over two years ago. He populated Alexandria with fresh settlers from the surrounding district and left those soldiers in the city who were unfit for further service.

On the Path of Mythical Warriors

For the Greeks of the time, India was an ill-defined land wrapped in myths and legends. Alexander aspired to surpass the feats of ancient conquerors and even those of the legendary heroes and Greek mythical figures. From Alexandria ad Caucasus, the Macedonian army marched eastward and entered into an assembly area at the confluence of the Alishing and Alingar Rivers, which join the Kophen (Kabul) river in Laghman. The direct route to the Indus was the traditional road along the Kabul River through the Khyber Pass and the Peshawar Valley to Taxila, the capital of upper Punjab. Since the hill tribes north of the main route refused to submit to Alexander’s authority, the flank of the army was exposed. Therefore, Alexander decided to use a two-pronged approach in his advance to Taxila. He divided his army into two columns. He ordered Hephaestion and Perdicas with a strong division to march along the main road down the valley of the Kophen to Peukelaotis (modern Charsadda) and then to the river Indus.

Meanwhile Alexander took the second division of light forces and headed northeast along a circuitous route into the hilly country encompassing the modern regions of Laghman

and Kunar in Afghanistan and the Bajaur, Dir, Swat, and Yousafzai country in Northwest Pakistan, leading to the Indus River. Here lay the territories of three warlike tribes: the Aspasians (Laghman, Kunar, and Bajaur), Gauraians (Panjkora), and Assakenians (Swat and Buner). The Aspasioi were related to the Assakenoi and were a western branch of them. Both people were admired by the Greeks for their fighting ability. Alexander personally directed operations against these clans, who stubbornly resisted from their mountain strongholds and fought the Macedonians fiercely. Even their women took up arms and fought alongside their husbands. Alexander was entering a different phase of the invasion, marked by fierce mountain warfare in the highlands west of the Indus River as he proceeded to the intended conquest of India.

From Alexander's departure from Laghman until his descent on the banks of the Indus, two patterns of warfare dominated the armed struggle between the conquering forces and the native mountaineers. The natives often traded space for time and the invaders killed their way to victory. In the face of an overwhelming enemy force, the natives would break contact and rush to sanctuaries in their rugged mountains, which were hardly accessible to the attackers. This traditional way of war in the mountains of Afghanistan has been sustained for centuries and was practiced during the foreign invasions of Afghanistan in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Meanwhile, Alexander often punished resistance by mass killing and scorched-earth actions—a policy the Macedonian king practiced not only earlier in Bactria and Soghdiana but also in his home country, such as the punishment of Thebes in 334 BC.[27]

The arduous march punctuated by bloody clashes along the mountainous tract caused losses to both sides of the conflict. Alexander was wounded twice during the battle. The Macedonians were forced to fight ferocious battles in Kunar, Nawagai, Massaga (north of Malakand Pass), and the

fortresses of Ora and Bazira, which stood on the high ground along his intended route to the Indus through the Malakand Pass. The fugitives of these fortresses fled across the Shang-La Pass to Aornus, a rock citadel on the Indus, the last major fortress west of the Indus to conquer.

Aornus was a hard-to-reach mountain stronghold on the Indus River north of the confluence of the Kabul and Indus Rivers. In old Indian, Aornus is identified as Avarana, meaning “the hiding place.” It is said to have had a circuit of about 200 stadia (about 12 miles) and at its lowest elevation a height of 11 stadia (over 7,000 feet). The rock was washed on its southern face by the river Indus, which at this point was very deep. On the other sides, the mount was enclosed by ravines, cliffs, and swamps, making it difficult for the most-determined assailants to negotiate the barriers. Only a single path provided access to the summit. Aornus was long believed to be the great mountain now known as Mahaban, but later the site was satisfactorily identified with the modern mountain Pir-Sar in Swat by Sir Aurel Stein in 1926, which has been confirmed since by archaeologists.[28] It offered the last threat to Alexander’s supply line, which was vulnerably stretched over the Hindu Kush heights to Persia and Central Asia.

Apart from military exigencies, Alexander’s desire to capture the stronghold (the rock) was motivated by a legend that the demigod Heracles, whom he claimed as an ancestor, had failed to conquer this impregnable site.[29] However, Arrian believes that Heracles did not penetrate so far in the east and opines that the legend of Heracles was mentioned to make the story of its capture all the more wonderful.[30] Further, a local myth told that a Hindu god, probably Krishna, had been unable to capture this rock.

After seizing a foothold over an adjacent height and building a pathway to the rock the Macedonians were able to effectively shoot arrows and hurl missiles from siege engines

at the stronghold. Finally, Alexander, with 700 men specially picked for the mission, scaled up the cliff at the moment the garrison began to retire and slew many of them during their retreat. Some defenders were so terrified that they threw themselves down the precipices to their deaths. Alexander built a fort on top of the hard-fought rock and gave command of its garrison to a Bactrian who had defected to him from Bessus's army in Bactria.

This concluded Alexander's military conquest of ancient Ariana. During the campaign, the key to the Macedonians' military victory was not only their superior organization and better-disciplined army but also how this military machine was used in a cohesive way and was led effectively against the native forces. The natives were highly inspired by their passion to defend their homeland and were favored by operating in a hospitable military environment but failed to create a unified front against the invaders. Their actions were fragmented, piecemeal, and defensive, ceding the initiative to the Greeks. On the other hand, the invaders were constrained by their lengthy line of communication and the challenge of replenishing the army's ranks as they moved forward.

Homeward Exodus

Having conquered the Persian Empire, Alexander set out to invade India. However, what the chroniclers of the Macedonian conqueror called "Indian conquest" was in fact only a dash to Punjab through the rugged country west of the Indus. He marched into Punjab to fight and win the Battle of Hydaspes (Jhelum) in 326 BC against King Porus. But the kingdom of Porus was just the gateway to much greater powers in the east along the Ganges River, including the powerful Nanda Empire of Magadha (northwest India) and the Gangaridai Empire of Bengal. Fearing the prospects of

facing other powerful Indian armies and exhausted by years of campaigning, Alexander's army mutinied at the Hyphasis (Beas) River, refusing to march further east. Thus this river marks the easternmost extent of Alexander's conquests before he led his army homeward; Alexander finally arrived in Babylon in the spring of 323 BC and a few months later died on June 10 or 11 just before his thirty-third birthday.

The story of Alexander, as told and retold by ancient Greek and Roman writers, is a fascinating drama of the most extraordinary feats ever achieved by a military leader. The glare of spears, the shimmer of phalanx armor, and the miraculous charges of the companion cavalry rounding the enemy flanks highlight the tale of Greek columns fighting the "barbarians." The Macedonian army measured glory in terms of enemy casualties. There, everything great and grand is coupled with the name of Alexander. There is not much recorded about administrative and organizational achievements except those made in support of military conquest.

In military strategic terms, two remarkable features of Alexander's military campaign in the east were the ability to keep the army up to required strength, and the ability to maintain the logistic system along a lengthy line of communication. Alexander continued to recruit troops from Greece as well as from the conquered lands as his force advanced. Gaps in the ranks were constantly filled up and the fighting strength of the force was maintained at required level. Despite the need to station troops in garrisons along the way, Alexander fielded around 40,000 infantry and 7,000 cavalry at the battle of Gaugamela in October 331 BC. The army ranks were filled by mercenaries from Greece and the enlistment of similar fighters in Persia. Although strength figures of armies of the ancient world are always open to question, Alexander's host must have been very large.

Curtius, for instance, gave the army a total of 120,000 at the start of the Indian campaign.[31]

The Macedonian forces in their Asian campaign lived off the land. Their logistic system was based on local procurement of supplies and a network of bases established along the line of communication. However, the pace of movement was mostly dependent on the status of the local economy and the availability of a sufficient amount of supplies. Marching with a large train of supplies would slow the pace of movement. Therefore Alexander preferred to maintain a lean and mobile army free of the hindrance of heavy baggage. In 330 BC, as the army started moving toward Bactria, the columns could scarcely get moving under the weight of its spoils and extravagant impedimenta. Then, according to Alexander's chronicler Curtius, the king ordered that all wagons be destroyed to enhance the speed of the marching columns.[32] Plutarch recorded a similar event on the eve of Alexander's expedition to India when he noticed that his soldiers were so burdened with booty that it hindered their marching and so he ordered that the wagons be set on fire, including his own, to restore high mobility to the columns.[33]

In contrast to the classic chroniclers of Alexander, most modern writers look at the history of Alexander more critically. They acknowledge his extraordinary military leadership and soldierly creativeness but deny him credit for being a builder. Alexander dismantled what he encountered and built nothing sustainable in its place. In the words of one author, he replaced the mild albeit ineffective government of the Achaemenids with the tyranny of a foreign military autocracy that presided over the disintegration of the conquered lands into a battlefield of rival factions.[34] In the romanticized accounts of the classic chroniclers of the Macedonian king, there is a conspicuous absence of planning to build and sustain his new order. Alexander "was of all

things an idealist and they who have not read that in the story of his life may as well not have read it at all."[35] The only system of government Alexander had time to organize was that of military occupation, where the military commandant of each district was the satrap, who ruled locally in the name of the conqueror. The system worked as long as Alexander was alive (which was not a long time). But on his death, the controlling power based on the prestige of the conqueror's name and character quickly vanished. As A. B. Bosworth writes, "Alexander's most sympathetic chronicler in ancient times [Arian] describes his reign as more or less continuous fighting, at times verging on massacre for its own sake, and his emphasis is certainly correct. Alexander spent much of his time killing and arguably, killing was what he did best."[36] This statement is best exemplified by the massacre of the cities along the Jaxartes and the Zarafshan Valley in Central Asia (329 BC) as well as in the Massaga mass killing (327 BC). The real measure of Alexander's achievement is what Benjamin Wheeler summarized by saying that "if a man's life-work is to be judged only by what he erects into formal organization, then we must pronounce the career of Alexander a failure, and more than a failure. . . . The story of Alexander has become a story of death. He died himself before his time. With his life he brought the Old Greece to its end; with his death the state he had founded."[37]

The Disintegration of Greek Power in the East and the Rise of New Empires

The sudden death of Alexander with no apparent and legitimate successor plunged his dominions into a lengthy state of turmoil as his generals fought each other in a fierce struggle for power. The imperial setup created in more than a decade of conquest was about to melt away almost as quickly as it materialized. Alexander's dream to integrate the

conquered lands into a great Greco-Asiatic state was turning into a nightmare.

Dissension and rivalry soon led to a power struggle that involved the satrapies as the power bases of the contenders for power. The war of successors in the west reverberated in the east with calls for secession and independence. The eastern empire included all the countries between the Caspian Sea and the Sutlej River, encompassing what is today eastern Iran, Afghanistan, and Punjab. This area was exposed to Hellenistic influence by Greek settlements and Greek government. But soon after the death of Alexander, de-Hellenization broke out in these regions. A prominent rebel leader known as Chandragupta succeeded in unifying fragmented nations into a major empire, the Maurya Empire, which stretched from the Indus to the Ganges River and beyond. He successfully withstood the invasion of Seleucus Nicatar, who ruled over the Asian territories of the Macedonian dominions from Syria.

Further west, following the assassination of Seleucus in 281 BC, an intense power struggle ensued between Syria and Egypt. Bactria seized this obvious opportunity to throw off the imperial yoke, which had become nominal anyway. In 250 BC, Diodotus, the Greek satrap of Bactria revolted, setting the example for others. His Parthian vassal Andragoros followed suit, and the two new kingdoms that developed into great empires were born. In the words of Justin, “Diodotus, the governor of the thousand cities of Bactria, revolted and proclaimed himself king; all the other people of the orient followed his example and seceded from the Macedonians.”[38]

The Greeks in Bactria who had integrated into the Bactrian nation through intermarriage and cultural accommodation “grew so powerful on account of the fertility of the country that they became masters, not only of Ariana, but also of India and more tribes were subdued by them than by

Alexander."[39] Shortly afterward, Arsaces, a native of Bactra, fled to Parthia, because his rival, Diodotus, had prevailed in his native city. Following the Bactrian example, Arsaces defeated and killed the former satrap and self-proclaimed king of Parthia, Andragoros, and founded the Parthian dynasty, which expanded into a vast empire in West Asia lasting about 500 years. The alliance with Bactria helped the Parthian Kingdom (also known as Arsacid) win a decisive victory over the powerful Seleucid monarch in 237 BC and launched the Parthian Empire on its path to greatness, rivaling not only Bactria and Syria but Rome itself.

Afterward, in the course of about 1,000 years, while new waves of invasions from the north led to the rise of successive empires around Hindu Kush, including the Saka (Scythians) kingdoms (1st century BC–1st century AD), the Kushans (30–375 AD), and Ephthalites (408–670), in the west the Parthian power was supplanted by the rise of the Persian Sassanid Empire (226–651). The geostrategic situation shaped the course of military conquests in two opposite directions by dynasties centered in the western and eastern segments of the Iranian plateau. In classic terms, these segments represented the Bactrian-Ariana space in the east and the Persis-Median space in the west. Meanwhile the competing regional powers continued to clash on the geographic edges of their empires.

Faced directly with the threat of nomads, the Greco-Bactrian and the Parthian kings pursued the policy of fortifying the northern frontiers with exceptional zeal. More than two centuries after Alexander, the Chinese explorer Chang-Ch'ien (Zhang Qian) in 128 BC found Bactria and Soghdiana a land of walled towns. He stated the number of walled compounds only in Bactria at over a million. These large, walled villages were meant to protect the population from nomad raids until the troops of the king or satrap could intervene.[40] The epithet of "the thousand cities of Bactria" or

“mille urbium Bactrianarum,” mentioned by the classic writers, is a reflection of the proliferation of walled towns in Bactria.[41] In fact, the *Hazar Shahr-e Bakhter,* or “the thousand cities of Bactria,” the historical epithet of Bactria, developed from the walled cities and towns in the region.[42] Many of these military colonies became the hubs of future cities. Border security measures included the pacification of turbulent areas through cultural influence. The spread of Zoroastrianism and Buddhism contributed to the effort.

During this period, the borders of Central Asia were set by the relationship between the sedentary and nomadic people. The turbulent conquests of the nomads were transient while the influence of the settled peoples, which changed the nomads through integration and assimilation, was slow but enduring. The legacy of the long frontier war left lasting imprints on the region’s folklore and generated sensational historical accounts, myths, epics, and legends.

As much as Afghanistan was geographically vulnerable to invasions from the north, India in the east was susceptible to attacks from the west through Afghanistan. In many cases the invasion of Afghanistan from the north had a squeezed-balloon effect, pushing the threatened powers toward India, which was geographically easily accessible from the northwest. Further, India was considered a rich land that was weakly defended. Since the first millennium BC India has been repeatedly invaded from the northwest, mostly through the two main gateways of the Khyber and Bolan Passes. During this period India was invaded a dozen times from the west as opposed to only two major conquests launched from India westward.

Exchanges in Military Culture

The unceasing competition for supremacy by the dominant powers in Western, Central, and South Asia over the

centuries also resulted in the exchange of military culture over a wide region. Consequently, different warring states and armies learned from their experience and adapted the best practices demonstrated by various militaries on the battlefield. From the heavy infantry of the Macedonians to the fast-moving, lightly armed nomadic mounted archers, a wide variety of military skills were demonstrated in centuries-long confrontations. The experience covered all forms of military science, including the force structure, battle formations, weapons and equipment, and combat tactics. The process disseminated the Grecian culture of heavy infantry (*Phalanx*) to the east, as far as India, and the employment of heavily armed cavalry (*Cataphract*)[43] from Asia to Rome. Meanwhile a similar cross-adaption of weapons and war machines took place across the region. The Macedonians' introduction and use of siege engines such as the catapult and siege towers were initially alien to Parthians, but they adapted to their use as they expanded to the west and faced the Romans. The Romans too subsequently improved the quality and technology of siege equipment and the introduction and improvement of heavily armed cavalry. The reputed skills of the Scythian archers captured the attention of many armies, and the Scythian mounted archers were widely employed as mercenaries.

The way of war of the nomads of Central Asia proved to be effective as long as they used hit-and-run tactics in their raids on the sedentary areas in the south. Their lightly armed mounted archers, who raided settled areas, towns, and villages and then rapidly dashed back into their steppes, saw themselves as invulnerable to their enemies, who would not risk pursuing them into the depth of their endless wilderness. However, once these nomads got involved in wars with enemies outside their home turf, they soon realized their military weaknesses and tried to adapt to new means and different ways of war.

The Sakas, the Parthians, and the Kushans developed the combined use of lightly armed mobile archers and the armored mounted lancers (the *Cataphract*) in combat. The light cavalry, armed with bow and a sword, were the "hussars" suitable for skirmishes, hit-and-run tactics, and flank attacks but could not sustain close combat. On the other hand the *Cataphract*, which had an enormous striking power but lacked high mobility, was the arm of decisive combat at close quarters. Their lancers wore steel helmets and a coat of mail made of rawhide covered with scales of iron or steel and reaching to the knees. This enabled them to withstand heavy blows. Their offensive arms included a long spear that was of great strength and thickness and a bow and arrows of unusual size. They likewise carried a short sword for close combat. Their horses were, like themselves, protected by armor made either of steel or of bronze.[44] Starting in the third century, the Romans also formed units of heavy cavalry of the oriental type, which they called *clibanarii*.

The usual tactical concept was to employ the light horse archers in a loose, extended order to engage the enemy ranks with a shower of arrows from a distance and thus soften up the enemy lines for a striking blow by the heavy forces—the *Cataphract*. One of the best examples of such tactics is seen in the Battle at Carrhae (now Harran, Turkey) between the Parthian and Roman armies in 53 BC. It was then that the Parthian light and *Cataphract* cavalry, headed by Surenas, demonstrated their superiority over the famous Roman infantry legions' "infantry square," commanded by Marcus Crassus, who fell in the battle.[45]

Meanwhile, the Greek, Saka, Kushan, and Ephthalite armies, which conquered India, adapted the use of war elephants and war chariots, which were still fashionable in the subcontinent. The war elephants appeared on the battlefields, outside India, in early Hellenistic Bactria under

the Seleucids. Although the use of war elephants was also recorded in Europe in ancient times, the combat effectiveness of the beasts has been controversial. Hans Delbruck writes that one cannot find a single corroborated battle in which the elephants accomplished something of importance. He asserts that to the contrary usually the side that was stronger in elephants was defeated.[46] Obviously Delbruck is referring to the use of war elephants in the west, and the judgment does not apply to the military history of the east. War elephants survived on the battlefield for centuries because they proved to be valuable assets in tactical combat.

As the Central Asians learned to supplement their light forces with heavily armed troops, the Romans learned how to complement the ability of their well-drilled infantry columns with mobile auxiliary troops composed of light cavalry and bowmen. The Sassanids' failure to do the same contributed to their defeat in the face of light and mobile Arab armies in the seventh century AD.

The Rise of Islam and the Muslim Arab Conquests

The rise of Islam in the early seventh century in the Arabian Peninsula marked a monumental shift in the social and political map of the world. Islam came as a blessing to Arabia, as it unified different warring tribes and clans into an empire-building nation. The polity established by the Prophet Mohammad saw a rapid expansion under his immediate successors, the Rashidun (the Rightly Guided) caliphs and the Umayyad dynasties that followed them. In six years the whole of Syria and Palestine came under the sway of the Arab armies, followed by the conquest of Persia. This ended the Sassanid Empire after the crushing defeat of King Yazdegerd III at Nahavand in 642. About 100 years after the

death of the Prophet, the Muslim conquests incorporated vast areas into the Muslim world stretching from the Iberian Peninsula in the west to the borders of China and India in the east. “Under the Umayyads,” writes Edward Gibbon in the *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, “the Arabian empire extended two hundred days’ journey from east to west, from the confines of Tartary and India to the shores of the Atlantic.”[47]

The fast advance of the Arab armies was fostered by a combination of the ideological force of the new faith and a strategy to harness the martial culture of the Arab tribes into a unified power for conquest beyond the borders of the Arabian Peninsula. Prior to the revelation of Islam, the nomad culture of raiding other tribes for booty (known as *razzia*) was a way of life in the harsh environment of the Arabian Desert. *Razzia* entailed raids for plunder and slaves. The raiders would suddenly swoop on a small group of a hostile tribe with a great force and escape with the booty and no loss of life. *Razzia* was also a way of war between two groups who had serious differences with each other.

The spread of Islam and its teachings brought about a fundamental change in the practice of *razzia*. Islam forbade the conduct of *razzia* against fellow Muslims. Meanwhile, the messianic duty of fighting the enemies of the Islamic community and the duty to spread the new faith gave new meaning to *razzia* as it sanctified into *ghazwa*.[48]

When the Arab armies fanned out across the ancient world in the seventh century, they overcame most of the resistance offered by opposing armies. But the speed of advance in different directions was uneven. The geography and terrain hindered the pace of progress and conditioned the direction and the scope of conquests. In the east, the Arab armies conquered Persia as far as the great rivers of Central Asia, but the craggy massif of the Hindu Kush stopped them. Although many former invading hordes had

used the Hindu Kush defiles to invade India, the only serious Arab invasion was in Sind, through the desert of Makran, where they faced no mountainous barriers. Arabs also sailed from Siraf and Hormuz in the Persian Gulf along the coast to the mouth of the Indus River.

Popular resistance also conditioned the rate of advance of the conquering Arab Muslim armies. Their victory over the decadent domains of the Roman and Persian Empires was relatively swift. Syria was reduced to submission in five years and Persia in seven. It took them only two years to conquer all of Egypt. But when the Arabs confronted more turbulent and warlike people and tribes, their advance slowed and tempered. In Khorasan, Sistan, and Central Asia, every town resisted. In northern Africa, Carthage was reached within a few years of the conquest of Egypt, but it did not actually fall for nearly half a century. The vigorous resistance of the Barbar tribes delayed the progress of Muslims in Africa until the end of the seventh century.

Islamization of Afghanistan

In the middle of the seventh century, the Muslim Arab armies, pursuing the defeated Persian King Yazdegerd III, came in contact with the people of the lands occupied by modern Afghanistan. Although it took another decade before the last Sassanid monarch was killed in Merv, the arrival of Arab armies in 642 opened the way to the conquest of Afghanistan.

The political conditions in and around Afghanistan at the period of the Arab conquests were very complex. As the sixth century wore on, the weakening of the Sassanid influence in the south and the drooping grip of the western Turks in the north gave rise to local semi-independent dynasties that ruled in separate provinces on both sides of the Hindu Kush. In the north, the native Kushano-Euphthalite

principalities were reconstructed in Tokharistan (northeastern Afghanistan), Badghis, and Herat under the intermittent suzerainty of the Turks and the Sassanids. In Transoxiana and Tokharistan, the Turks' influence was often limited to the appointment of military governors and the collection of tributes while the native princes and local *dehqan* (local ruling nobles) remained in power.[49]

In the south, two local dynasties ruled the area from Sistan in the southwest to the Indus basin in the east. The Kabul and Gandhara region had been under the rule of the Buddhist and then Hindu dynasty called the Kabul Shahis since the fifth century. The area between Sistan and Zabulistan up to the limits of Kabul was ruled by a dynasty identified as Zunbils and Rutbils by early Muslim authors. Zunbils were the descendants of the southern Hephthalites (also known as Ephthalites). Their territory included what is now the city of Zaranj in southwestern Afghanistan to Kabul, with Zamindawar and Ghazni serving as their capitals.

The eastward advance of the Arab armies, after the defeat of the Sassanid army at the Battle of Nahavand in 642, followed two divergent strategic axes running through the wide plains to the north and south and skirting the Great Salt Desert in the center, which is virtually impassable by large forces. The most important road was the northern Khorasan route, which stretches from Hamadan to Tehran and on to the greater Khorasan plains, reaching northern Afghanistan and Central Asia. The other route lay far to the south, linking the western Iranian plains to Fars and Kerman Provinces and extending to Sistan and southern Afghanistan. The two conquest routes again swerve north and south on the two sides of the Hindu Kush Mountains. The geography conditioned the directions of the Arab invasion beginning in 642. In the north the invasion was directed from the strategic base of Merv, which was occupied by the Muslims in 650–651, toward Northeastern Afghanistan (Tokharistan) and Transoxiana (*mawara un-nahr*). The southern axis was

used to conquer southern Afghanistan and its southeastern extension into Sind. The operation along this route was launched from strategic bases at Kerman and Sistan. The two axes converged in western Afghanistan at the Sistan-Herat plain but remained divergent in the east due to the Hindu Kush mountain barriers.

The Arab conquest and the spread of Islam in Afghanistan featured three distinct phases:

- the military conquest and colonization;
- the increasing political authority of the Islamized native powers andtheir influence in shaping the politics of the Islamic caliphate;
- the rise of independent Muslim dynasties in Afghanistan.

The first phase opened with the Arab armies' pursuit of Yazdegerd III into Sistan and Khorasan in 642 AD and lasted until the end of Umayyad rule in 750 AD. This period was the expansion of the Arabian Empire through military conquests during which Arab governors and generals led sporadic raids along the two northern and southern conquest routes into modern Afghanistan to reduce local powers and force them to pay tribute. In the later years of this phase, as the Arab influence increased, the conquerors began to colonize major cities through the settlement of Arab tribes and military occupation. The process expedited proselytization and the emergence of local Muslim communities linked to metropolitan power centers.

Khorasani Influence in Shaping the Politics of the Islamic Caliphate

The Arab conquest of Khorasan and Sistan in the seventh and early eighth centuries, along with consistent

proselytizing, made steady progress in replacing local practices of Zoroastrianism and Buddhism with the Islamic faith. Further, the Arab rulers increasingly recruited non-Arab converts into the military and raised native levies and auxiliary military forces to augment the Arab armies. The more the native forces integrated into the new order, the stronger their influence in local politics became. Moreover, the tribal division within the Arab armies in Khorasan fostered tribal rivalries and competition for the local resources and political standing. The people of the conquered lands, who had unsuccessfully struggled to preserve their independence in the face of the Arab invasion, refocused their efforts to become autonomous within the dominant system.

As the Khorasanis saw little prospect of winning influence under the Umayyads, they opted to tap into other sources of power in the empire and support the cause of the rival Abbasid dynasty (the descendants of “Abbas,” an uncle of the prophet). They also made common cause with the Shi’ites by pretending devotion to the family of the prophet (*ahl-i bait*). The social and political intricacies in the Muslim world provided legitimate causes to underpin their struggle for political influence. In Khorasan Province, there was a deep bitterness toward the Umayyads for murdering so many of Ali’s descendants. A native Khorasani saddler named Abdur-Rahman, who assumed the name of Abu-Muslim, became the main advocate of the house of Abbas and mobilized large masses, both Khorasanis and Arabs, in support of the Abbasid cause. On June 17, 747, he raised the black flag of rebellion in Merv and within a few months, in the words of Robert Payne, “the whole patiently acquired empire which had endured for ninety years toppled over and went to its death.”[50]

With a large influx of Iranian ideas into the Arab system, the influence of Khorasanis and Persians in the Abbasid administration grew increasingly. As the caliphs of the house

of Abbas emerged from Khorasan they adopted many customs and rituals of the Iranian royalties. The situation lifted the political standing of the Khorasanis while the Arabs began to lose their influence not only in the army and at court but in the society too. Armies from Khorasan dominated the caliphate military forces and played key roles in the caliphate military campaign across the empire.[51] Abu-Muslim, the first non-Arab governor of Khorasan under the Islamic rule, consolidated his power in Khorasan and Transoxiana. His rising popularity began to alarm the Abbasid court, which owed its elevation to the throne to him and his Khorasani followers. Right after the caliph's brother, Abu Ja'far Mansur, visited Merv, the court became alarmed at the influence and independence of Abu-Muslim. Upon accession to the caliphate, Mansur planned the assassination of the Khorasani leader. According to Tabari, Mansur also held personal jealousy and animosity toward Abu-Muslim.[52]

The murder of Abu-Muslim resulted in wide resentment, particularly in Khorasan. The fallen hero became a legendary figure for many in Khorasan and Persia, and his soul inspired several rebellions led by his followers (some of whom claimed that he had not died and would return). While some of these rebellions had an extremist, religio-political basis, the resentment over how the Abbasids dealt with a Khorasani hero survived for a long time. More than a century later, when Amir Yaqub Laith Safar launched his campaign against the Abbasid Caliphate, he used the murder of Abu-Muslim by the Abbasids as one reason for defiance of the legitimacy of the Abbasid rule over Khorasan.[53]

For the next few generations, the story of Khorasani leaders' influence in the Abbasid administration saw many ups and downs. Several prominent figures from Khorasan rose to the highest levels of power only to fall suddenly as the caliphs saw their increasing influence as a threat to their authority. One such influential Khorasani clan, which was

closely involved in the caliphate affairs, was the Barmakid dynasty. The Barmakids, a prominent family from Balkh, wielded great political power under the Abbasid Caliphs of Baghdad. But the Barmakids' ascendency to the highest level of power suddenly reversed in 803 as their patron, Caliph Harun al-Rashid, unceremoniously sacked and destroyed their all-powerful dynasty.

Less than a decade after the tragic downfall of the Barmakids, another Khorasani leader, Tahir ibn Hussein, played a key role in securing the throne for Harun's son Ma'mun during his war of succession with his brother Amin. Tahir was appointed to the important post of governor of Khorasan in 821. About two years later, after Tahir consolidated power in the province, he failed to read the Friday prayer *khutba* in the caliph's name, thereby signifying an act of independence. The next morning he was found dead, poisoned by Ma'mun's agent.[54] His descendants, however, ruled for four generations in Khorasan until the dynasty was overthrown by the Saffarids of Sistan in 873.

The Decline of the Abbassid Caliphate and the Rise of Local Muslim Dynasties

The rise of the Tahirid dynasty in Khorasan coincided with the decline of the Abbassid Caliphate's control over the empire's peripheries as the thrust of the Arab projection of power dissolved in the middle of the eighth century. The decline gave way to the rise of autonomous local dynasties, which in the course of time regarded the "Commander of the Faithful" as more of a spiritual leader than a temporal overlord. The waning of the political power of the caliphate notwithstanding, the religious influence of the office became more prominent. The caliph was regarded as the heir of the prophet, whereupon the authority of the most powerful monarchs cowered before his hallowed grandeur. He was in a

position to legitimize the authority of local monarchs and the expansion of their power in the Muslim world or delegitimize them. Thus local independent rulers used the caliph's blessing as an instrument of legitimacy in their competing schemes for expansion.

The process of political fragmentation was furthered by the simultaneous weakening of the center and the strengthening of the peripheries. On the one hand, local governors appointed by the caliph grew too powerful to be dictated to by the center. On the other hand, the vacuum created by the waning control of Baghdad was filled by local leaders who led successful uprisings or asserted independence. In Afghanistan, the former case was exemplified by the rise of Tahirids (821–873) and Samanids (819–999), and the latter case by the Saffarids (861–1003).

The emerging local dynasties that based their rights only on the sword often saw building and maintaining large armies as their way to survival within a volatile political environment. Maintaining large armies required finances, which were often unavailable locally and had to be acquired from other areas, usually through military invasion and the conquest of resource-rich countries. Thus, the race for power through expansion became the hallmark of interaction between the competing regional powers in and around Afghanistan. Eventually the control of conquered lands required more military forces and more funds. Therefore the local Muslim dynasties that rose to power in Afghanistan between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, including the Tahirids, Saffarids, Samanids, Ghaznavids, and Ghorids, were mostly based on military power manifested in maintaining large armies.

Beside the internal struggle for power among local dynasties in Afghanistan during this period, the omnipresent push of nomadic Turkic hordes from the north continued to pose a constant challenge to the power of the states in the south. The Samanids were overthrown by the Qarakhanids, a

Uighur Turkic dynasty that belonged to the Qarluq tribal confederation. The confederation ruled in Transoxiana and Central Asia (999–1211). The Ghaznavids were challenged by the Seljuks and the Ghorids by the Khwarazmids. Among these, the dynasties in the east, with room to expand toward India, were in a favorable position to compensate their losses in the north and west with gains to the east. The early Ghaznavids and the Ghorids had an advantage over their rivals, with their ability to tap into the wealth of India and Khorasan to fund their military operations. In any case, the situation kept Afghanistan in a state of militarization that often hindered the development of nonmilitary institutions.

The nature of military institutions and their conduct was closely linked to the sociopolitical nature of the society. The constant rise and fall of ruling dynasties and the prevalence of an unstable security environment reinforced a state of localism in political, social, and military life. While state armies focused on dynastic interests, nonstate local groups and factions emerged that took on paramilitary tasks and local interests and sometimes acted as outlaw bands or sources of local resistance. One of the legendary local paramilitary groups in Afghanistan was the *‘ayyaran*. The *‘ayyaran* were people associated with a class of warriors in Iraq, Persia, Khorasan, and Sistan during the ninth through twelfth centuries. The word literally means vagabond, and in Persian sources the *‘ayyaran* are variably described as anything from irregular fighters, rogues, highwaymen, and robbers[55] to noble-minded highwaymen or generous, clever, brave, modest, pious, chaste, hospitable, generally upright persons.[56] The *‘ayyaran* activities were prominent during times of weak government and civil war, when their role as a military force most likely made them fight on opposing sides. The Saffarids (861–1003) of Sistan, the first independent non-Arab Muslim state in Afghanistan, were in fact an *‘ayyaran* dynasty, as the founder of the kingdom, Yaqub ibn Laith, was a leader of the *‘ayyaran* of Sistan.

The Saffarids (861–1003)

Although the Tahirids, who ruled in Khorasan for about half a century (821–873), are considered the first autonomous Muslim dynasty in the east, its legitimacy was still linked to the approval of the Islamic Caliphate of Baghdad. The actual independence of Khorasan from Baghdad was achieved by the successor dynasty of Saffarids founded by a self-made Sistani military leader, Yaqub ibn Laith, in 861.The rise of the Saffarids to power was fostered by the decline of the Abbassid authority in Sistan and the weakening of local rulers in the region. Yaqub and his three brothers, ‘Amr, Tahir, and Ali, hailed from the village of Qarnin, located at a distance of one day’s march from the capital of Zaranj, the capital of Sistan.[57] Yaqub is known as Saffar (coppersmith) due to his father’s trade and his earlier occupation before he became an *‘ayyar* and then a local warlord. He was the leader *sarhang* of an *‘ayarran* band, which at times acted as highwaymen. But he was also known for his Robin Hood–type generosity to the poor and kindness in treatment of his prisoners.[58] Yaqub became one of the most popular heroes of Khorasan and Iranian history for overthrowing the rule of the Arab overlords and challenging the authority of the Abbassid Caliph by leading his army against Baghdad.

The rise of the Saffarids to imperial power was as rapid as their downfall, which occurred within half a century. Their explosion to power was greatly linked to the strong leadership of Yaqub ibn Laith, who was known for his iron discipline, his prompt actions to serve justice, his fearlessness in battle, his affection for his followers, his chivalrous treatment of his prisoners, and his unparalleled toughness in the field. One of his opponents, Hasan ibn Zayd, the ruler of Tabaristan, called him the “anvil” on account of his iron character.[59]

After consolidating his power in Sistan, Yaqub conquered Herat, Kerman, and Fars between 867 and 879, and the

caliph invested in him the viceroyalty of Balkh and Tokharistan and all the country as far as the Indian frontier. In the east, Yaqub established his rule over an area that had never been fully conquered by the Muslim Arab armies. The early Arab governors of Sistan had at times penetrated as far as Ghazna and Kabul, but they were repeatedly driven back. Ghazna and Kabul fell to the Saffarid ruler in 870.This was the first systematic effort to spread Islam into Afghanistan and to the borders of India after the expansion of Arab Muslims into eastern Afghanistan had stopped. The expedition also extended the authority of the Saffarid Empire to Sind and Makran in the south. In 872, the Saffarid king moved north across the Hindu Kush Passes and seized Balkh —another first in linking up the northern and southern axes of Muslim advance into Afghanistan.

Yaqub's dramatic military expedition against Baghdad was a unique event in the annals of the Abbassid Caliphate. Caliph Mu'tamid tried to discredit Yaqub in the eyes of Muslims and mobilized them against him. Meanwhile he fielded a 150,000-strong army under his brother Muwaffak to stop Yaqub, who had led his 100,000-man army in two columns from Khuzestan north to the plain of Hormuz. The two armies finally faced each other at Dayr al-'Aqul on April 8, 876. Although Yaqub lost the battle, the hostility continued to influence the relations between Zaranj and Baghdad. One of its major impacts was the caliph's attempts to promote the power of Ismail Samani, the ruler of another local dynasty, the Samanids, who ruled the Transoxiana from Bukhara, against Yaqub's brother and successor, Amr Laith. The caliph hoped that the orthodox and obedient Samanids could be used against the Saffarids. The competition for power eventually led to a major military encounter between the Saffarid and Samanid armies near Balkh in the year 900, where the Saffarids were defeated and 'Amr Laith was captured. Ismail sent 'Amr to Baghdad, where he was executed in 903. The caliph granted Isma'il power over

Khorasan, Tabaristan, Ray, and Isfahan. Thus ended the empire built by the two Saffar brothers. Although their dynasty ruled Sistan at times, the territory was mostly under the suzerainty of the Samanids and then the Ghaznavids in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Both Yaqub and ‘Amr founded their power on the sword and focused on the army as the most important element of the state. In fact the rapid rise of their dynasty to power was facilitated by the effectiveness of its military machine. Yaqub and ‘Amr were skilled military commanders and charismatic leaders. They were seasoned soldiers toughened by operating under harsh and contentious conditions. Meanwhile, they pursued a simple way of life, thereby setting an example to their troops, and avoided encumbering their army with unnecessary baggage. Yaqub slept on an old saddle cloth with his head on his shield and ate coarse food, the staples of Sagzi diet: barley bread, rice, leeks, onions, asafetida, and fish.[60]

The Samanids (819–999)

The fall of the Saffarids from power opened the way for the expansion of the Samanids’ authority, centered in Bukhara, far beyond their home turf in Transoxiana, which they had held since 819. At the peak of their power, under three great amirs—Ismail (892–907), Ahmad (907–913), and Nasr (913–943)—the Samanids controlled a vast territory extending from the Jaxartes Valley in Central Asia to the Persian Gulf and from the borders of India to the vicinity of Baghdad. It included Transoxiana and Khorasan, as well as Ray, Isfahan Tabaristan, Kerman, Sistan, Kabulistan, Ghazna, and Kandahar and all the way to the Suleiman Mountains in southeast Afghanistan.

One of the main security challenges faced by the Samanids was a persistent threat in the north. It was the

border of Dar al-Islam (abode of Islam), reached by Arabs in the eighth century and then taken over by the Samanids to control. It was a volatile frontier intermittently penetrated by the nomadic hordes of the steppes. The border war against the intruders and the expansion of territory further to the north were motivated by the fervor of *Jihad* and the drive to spread the Islamic faith in the region, which also entailed material rewards. The tradition was later manifested in the faith-inspired campaign of the *ghazis* under the early Ottomans in the fourteenth century on the border of Dar al-Islam facing the Byzantine Dar al-Harb (abode of war).[61]

The decline of the Samanids' power in the second half of the tenth century gave rise to a dynasty of Turkic origin in Afghanistan—the Ghaznavids. During this period the Turkish military leaders who firmly cemented their dominance in Khorasan weakened the authority of Bukhara over the peripheries. Alptigin, who held the command of the army of Khorasan, broke with the Samani court and decided to establish himself somewhere out of reach of his offended overlord and carve up a territory to rule. He seized control of Bamian and marched on Ghazna. There he founded the Ghaznavid kingdom in the heart of the Afghan mountains after defeating its local ruler, Abu Bakr Lawik—possibly of Kushano-Ephthalite lineage.

The Ghaznavids and Ghorids (977–1215)

The kingdom that Alptigin founded in Ghazna rapidly expanded under his successors. Alptigin died in 963, and after an interval of 13 years, during which his son and two of his slaves succeeded the throne, Sebuktigin, the son-in-law of Alptigin and one of his trusted slaves, assumed power. The dynasty reigned over an expanding territory, which, in the eleventh century, developed into the largest Muslim empire after the disintegration of the Abbassid Empire. Sebuktigin

mobilized the neighboring Afghan (Pashtun) tribes under his banner and added large districts to his dominions, extending from Peshawar in the east and Bust in the west. Sebuktigin was the first Muslim ruler who launched the invasion of India over the traditional northwest route. The invasion of the tenth century was the first in some 500 years, when foreign armies once again marched the hilly roads of the Khyber Pass and the valleys of Tochi and Gomal into the Indus Valley and beyond. Sebuktigin's military victory over Jaipal, the Brahman Raja of the Gandhara Valley and Punjab, opened the gate for further penetration into the subcontinent, which was completed under his son, Sultan Mahmud.

Mahmud (reigned 998–1030), a seasoned 27-year-old soldier and an experienced commander of the army of Khorasan, was a staunch Sunni Muslim. His campaign against the "idolaters" of India brought him rich stores of treasure and captives that furthered his power and polished his religious credentials in the eyes of fellow Muslims. During the course of more than three decades, Sultan Mahmud led 17 military expeditions to India, which spread his authority from the Indus River to the plains of Jumna. Meanwhile the Samanids' power had ended in Central Asia, and the Qarakhanid Turks, (840–1212) who replaced them, were successfully contained by the army of Ghazna. In the west, the decaying power of the Buyids (964–1062) crumbled before the marching Ghaznavid armies, which seized Ray, Isfahan, and some provinces of Iraq. Thus the Ghaznavid kingdom grew into the largest empire established after the dissolution of the Abbassid Caliphate. During the reign of Sultan Mahmud, his state expanded into an empire that stretched from Iraq and the Caspian Sea to the Ganges River and from the Aral Sea to the Indian Ocean, covering an area nearly three million square miles.

The Ghaznavid state was founded and expanded mostly by the military power. Because of its strong martial orientation, the army was considered the main pillar of state power. The

state military machine continued to develop as it conquered new lands and enormous stores of plundered treasures to fill the state coffers. A dynasty of Turkish slave origin, the Ghaznavids became highly Persianized and adopted an Islamo-Iranian identity. In the meantime, their military culture preserved some of the nomadic ethos of the Central Asian steppes. The Ghaznavids' army was characterized by three main features: the dominance of the slave soldiers; the ethnic diversity of the military forces; and the focus on high mobility for the rapid concentration and movement of forces over long distances.

Mahmud's most celebrated campaign among the Muslims was his next-to-last expedition in 1025–1026 to conquer the legendary temple of Somnath and to destroy its widely venerated idol. For this, he would win the title of *but-shekan* (idol breaker). The destruction of Somnath was a psychological setback to Hindus and India, and encouraged future invaders from the west to lead their armies across the plains of Hindustan. The main factors contributing to Mahmud's military gains were the lack of unified power in India, the use of obsolete tactics by the Hindu armies, and the *Jihad* fervor of the Muslim fighters, which brought thousands of volunteers from Central Asia and Khorasan to the ranks of the sultan's army of conquest. India, at that time, was divided into numerous kingdoms, many of which were feuding with one another. They included the Brahman kings of Gandhara and Punjab, the Tamara dynasty in Delhi and Kanauj, the Buddhist Palas of Magadha on the lower Ganges, the survivors of the Guptas in Malwa, and other principalities in the midland and in the south.

Modern Indian and Western authors also refer to the failure of the Indian armies to adopt new warfare techniques and to develop proper military forces to implement them.[62] In his book *Problems of Indian Defense*, K. M. Panikar writes that "so long as the preeminence of the elephant remained and the horse was used in war mainly for drawing chariots,

Indian military methods were adequate for India's own defense." But, he adds, "the Hindu armies based mainly on ponderous elephants and numerous but untrained infantry, broke before the cavalry charge of the Turk and later Mughal invaders. The heroism of individual warriors and the training of elephants were of no avail."[63] The superiority of the Ghaznavids' and the Ghorids' strategies and tactics was primarily due to their well-organized cavalry and their skills in archery. The combination of the two provided mobility and firepower, enhancing tactical effectiveness and flexibility to the extent that even in retreat the horsemen were able to turn in the saddle and shoot at the pursuing enemy. The invention of the stirrup in Central Asia led to a revolution in military capability in ancient times. Before the introduction of the stirrup, many armies used the horse for drawing chariots or transporting warriors. At that time in India, horses were not as effective as elephants since the rider of the elephant could shoot his arrows from his seat or use javelins and other weapons. With the appearance of the stirrup the situation drastically changed in favor of cavalry. With his feet firmly secured in the stirrup, the rider on the horse could stand up while riding and shoot his arrows or swing a sword without falling off the horse.

Further, Vincent Smith suggests that strategic and tactical stagnation in the Indian art of war caused the country to suffer repeated defeats in the face of invasions from the West. He wrote, "No Hindu general in any age was willing to profit by experience and learn the lesson taught by Alexander's operations long ago. Time after time enormous hosts, formed of the contingents supplied by innumerable Rajas, and supported by the delusive strength of elephants, were easily routed by quite small bodies of vigorous western soldiers, fighting under one undivided command, and trusting chiefly to well-armed mobile cavalry. Alexander, Muhammad of Ghor, Babur, Ahmad Shah Durrani, and other capable commanders all used essentially the same tactics,

by which they secured decisive victories against Hindu armies of almost incredible numbers."[64]

The power of the Ghaznavid Empire began to decline after the death of Mahmud in 1030. First the rising power of Seljuq Turks in Central Asia and Khorasan followed by the expansion of the Ghorid governors from the mountainous districts of Ghori pushed the Ghaznavid Empire to shrink until Alauddin Hussein, the chief of the Ghorids, launched a campaign against Ghazna and, after three fiercely fought battles at Zamindawar and near Ghazna in 1151, routed the army of Bahram-Shah and captured Ghazna. In a wild fury of vengeance Alauddin burned the beautiful capital of the Ghaznavids into ashes.

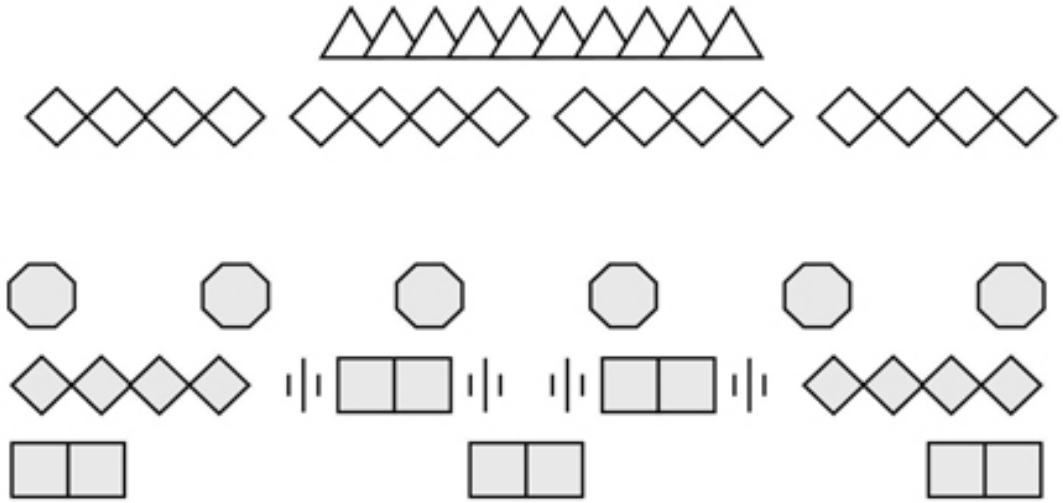
Alauddin ruled at Firozkoh until his death in 1161. His son succeeded him, and after his death, two years later, Alauddin's nephew, Ghiasuddin ibn Sam, took over the throne in 1163, and under his leadership, the Ghorid Empire reached its territorial extent and peak of power. Ghiasuddin recovered Ghazna from the mob of Turkmen Ghuzz in 1173–1174 and seated his brother Mu'izuddin Mohammad in Ghazna (also known as Shahabuddin and Mohammad Ghori) on the ruined throne of Mahmud. From his military base at Ghazna, Mohammad Ghori expanded his territory through military conquests in India.

A Battle that Changed India

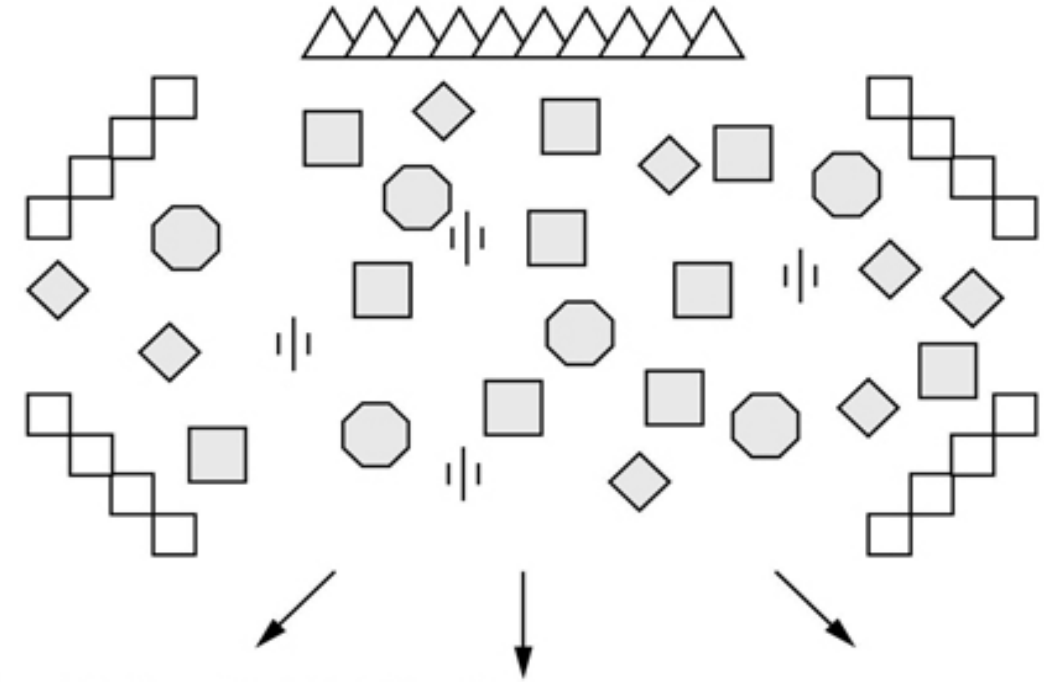
The most decisive battle of Mohammad Ghori in India was his fateful encounter with the Rajputs, led by Prithviraj (1149–1192), the chief of the Chauhan dynasty, which had succeeded the Tomaras in Delhi and Ajmer. The Battle of Tarain, also known as the Battle of Taroari, was fought in 1192 in Tarain, near Thanesar, in present-day Haryana (about 150 kilometers north of Delhi). The outcome of the battle led to far-reaching consequences that shaped the

future of India. Following an initial military setback against the Rajputs' coalition led by Prithviraj in 1191, Ghori mobilized a force of 120,000 Afghan (Pashtun), Tajik, and Turk troopers[65] into India to face about 150 Rajput chiefs who had assembled with their levies on the battlefield: "They swore by the water of Ganges that they would conquer their enemies or die martyrs to their faith."[66] The contemporary sources exaggerate the numbers of the Rajput army at 300,000 horse, 3,000 elephants, and innumerable foot soldiers.[67] Neither side may have fielded more than 60,000 to 70,000 combat troops on the battlefield, excluding the camp followers and service details. The two sides came face to face at Tarain (Taroari) in 1192.

The Battle of Terain, 1192



Phase 1—The disposition of opposing forces



Phase 2—The route of the Rajput Army

Ghori Army		Rajput Army	
Armored Cavalry		Cavalry	Elephants
Light Cavalry		Infantry	Guns

The Battle of Terain, 1192.

When Ghori's army reached the vicinity of the intended battlefield, the Rajput chief advised him to return and spare the lives of his men from a "definite annihilation." As a measure of deception, Ghori sent the Rajput leaders a request for truce pending his permission to retreat from his brother, Sultan Ghiasuddin, whom he served merely as a general. Overconfident about their strength and believing that Ghori was intimidated, the Rajput leaders relaxed the security around their camp. Taking advantage of the unwary enemy, Ghori launched a surprise attack before the ranks of the Rajputs swelled with the arrival of additional forces. The Ghorids' logistical constraints inside enemy territory precluded a drawn-out campaign, and it was in the interest of the Ghorids' army to fight a decisive battle as soon as the next day. The Ghorids' leader left the infantry, heavy detachments, banners, royal canopy, and trains nine miles behind in the main camp and led his picked cavalry in an attack on the enemy camp. Early in the morning, as the inhabitants of the sprawling Rajput camp on the plain of Tarain were looking forward to another peaceful day, the leading detachment of the Ghorids' cavalry descended on the unprepared Rajputs, who were busy in morning ablutions and taken by surprise. Hindu troops in the depths of the extensive camp were alerted in time to mount and form a battle line.

As the Rajput forces were recovering from the shock of the surprise attack, Mohammad Ghori regrouped his forces into five divisions. The first four were made up of 10,000 light cavalry troops wearing light armor and skilled in shooting arrows while riding. The fifth division consisted of 12,000 heavy cavalrymen clad in steel armor and kept in reserve for the final blow.[68] The light cavalry divisions were to advance to within bowshot range of the enemy and discharge their arrows against the center of the enemy line, and as the

enemy advanced with their elephants in front for close combat, the attacking horsemen were to fall back swiftly. The cavalry columns were also instructed to attack the enemy flanks jointly if one of the divisions was pursued by the enemy line and exposed its open flanks. The idea was to engage the enemy by different columns in hit-and-run attacks, wearing down the momentum of its advance. It was a typical running-cavalry battle mastered by the Central Asian horsemen and aptly used against the confused Rajputs, who were captive to their stagnant combat traditions. The Ghorid cavalry's Arab, Khorasani, and Turkmen horses outdid the enemy horses in stamina and endurance. The combat action was a match between a Ghorid army that combined maneuver and firepower in hitting the enemy and a Rajput force that was ponderous, moving slowly under the elephants' protection, and lacking the skill of shooting arrows while riding. So while the Rajputs were intent on forcing the enemy into close combat and trampling them under the feet of their elephants, the Ghorid cavalry avoided close combat, and when the enemy cavalry charged they gave ground. When the Rajputs halted, the Ghorids resumed their charge and kept attacking the Rajputs' ranks on their exposed flanks.

By the evening, the running battle had exhausted the Rajputs to the point that they could hardly withstand a heavy cavalry charge. Mohammad Ghori launched his final blow with his 12,000 heavy-cavalry reserve. The final strike was decisive. The cavalry charge created great confusion in the enemy ranks and destroyed their morale. Once the Rajput army was boxed in, it was massacred. Many Rajput leaders fell and Prithviraj fled the battlefield but was chased and captured near Sirsuti and executed. The Rajputs were totally routed and suffered heavy losses as the Ghorids' cavalry plowed into the enemy ranks, cutting down numerous foot soldiers who merely swelled the ranks but added little in combat skills.

The outcome of the battle sealed the fate of northern India for many centuries to come. It paved the way for the establishment of the Muslims' Delhi Sultanate and, except for the hills and deserts of Rajputana, no Hindu chief ruled in the north until the rise of the Sikh maharaja Ranjit Singh in the early nineteenth century. As Vincent Smith puts it, "All the numerous subsequent victories were merely consequences of the overwhelming defeat of the Hindu league on the historic plain (Taroari) to the north of Delhi."[69]

The victory led to the annexation of Ajmer, Hansi, and Sirsuti. Temples and idols were destroyed and mosques were built. Qutbuddin Aibak, a *ghu-lam* of Mohammad Ghori, was appointed viceroy of India, where he and the sultan expanded their territory in the greater part of northern India. Further, Gwalior, Badaun, Kalpi, Kalinjar, and Anhalwara in the south came under Ghori control.

The death of Sultan Ghiasuddin in 1203 and of his successor, Sultan Mohammad Ghori, in 1206 marked the decline of the Ghorid Empire, which lost much ground in Khorasan and suffered a decisive defeat against the Khwarazm ruler Sultan Mohammad (ruled 1200–1220). Meanwhile, different sections of the multiethnic army rose in support of different contenders to the throne. The last Ghori rulers were under the suzerainty of the Khwarazm Monarch Sultan Mohammad, who finally drove them out. All the Ghorid lands, except their possessions in India, fell under the Khwarazm-Shahids control in 1215—a few years before the Mongol invasion, which finally overthrew the Khwarazm-Shahids Empire.

The rise of the Ghorids from a highland chiefdom to a vast empire stretching from Gorgan in Persia to Bengal in India was a remarkable achievement. The short-lived empire played a significant role in Islamic history. In spite of their relatively short period of imperial rule, the Ghorids made an unparalleled penetration into India. Their expansion to the west and north, however, was challenged by the

Khwarazmids, who had greater access to the fighting men in the inner Asian steppes. The Ghorids finally lost in the west and gained in the east. Their legacy proved to be the most lasting in India. Compared to Sultan Mahmud's penetration into India, the Indian conquests of Mohammad Ghori were much wider and far more permanent. Of the two invasions, Mahmud's left little trace and was, in fact, a series of victorious raids, which, when their thrust was spent, had little force remaining to hold even a single province. Mohammad Ghori benefited from building a solid base in Punjab, which served as an anchor for his steady advance inside the subcontinent. After the demise of the Ghorid Empire, the territories it had conquered were consolidated under other Muslim rulers. Until the Indian mutiny in 1857, there was always a Muslim king seated on the throne in Delhi.

The Mongol Cataclysm

"They came and they destroyed, they burned and they slew, they trussed up the loot and they left." With these harrowing words, Juwayni, a contemporary chronicler, quoted a survivor describing the Mongol cataclysm that befell the prosperous cities of Transoxiana, Khorasan, and Afghanistan in the early thirteenth century.[70]

The tsunami of the Mongol invasion came to the region in early 1220, the Chinese Year of the Dragon, unheralded and unforeseen, taking the Muslim states and the rest of the world completely by surprise. Soon it spread in leaps and bounds across the lands, engulfing the whole area in devastating waves of fire and bloodshed. The invasion marked the beginning of the conquest of the Muslim states in Central and West Asia that eventually consumed virtually all of Eurasia. Although a conflict between the Mongol Khan, Chinggis, and the sultan of the Khwarazm Empire, Alauddin

Mohammad, initiated the invasion, the conquest extended far beyond the limits of the Khwarazmid state. In the course of four years (1219–1223) the Mongols massacred millions of local inhabitants, enslaved hundreds of thousands others, turned vast farming lands into killing fields, and totally destroyed the irrigation systems. The impact of the destruction continues even today in Afghanistan.

At the turn of the thirteenth century two major empires were forming on the two sides of the Asian continent. In the east, Chinggis Khan, born as Temujin, a leader among numerous obscure Mongol chiefs, rose to prominence in the remote vastness of Central Asian deserts after gaining control of his own tribe and then in the course of two decades overwhelmed other tribes by either defeating them in war or winning them over through deal making and delegating authority based on merit and loyalty rather than family ties. Thus all the Turko-Mongol tribes in the great *quriltai* (tribal council) of 1206—the Chinese Year of the Tiger[71]—gave him the new title “Chinggis Khan,” or the very mighty chief. During the next ten years, Chinggis Khan led successful campaigns against the Chinese dynasties and in 1215 marched triumphantly into the streets of Yanjing (today’s Beijing).

In the west, the Khwarazm-Shahids dynasty of Transoxiana, Khorasan, and Persia rapidly expanded into a vast empire after throwing off allegiance to the Qara-Khitai Empire in Central Asia. Within fifteen years the Khwarazmian sultan, ‘Alauddin Mohammad Khwarazm-Shah, seized control of most of Persia down to the Zagros Mountains, took Transoxiana from the weakened Qara-Khitai in 1210, and shifted his capital to Samarkand. Five years later he conquered much of the Ghorids’ territories in Afghanistan, pushing the successors of Mohammad Ghori to the east, where they established their northern Indian kingdom—a state known as the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526).

The power base of the two empires was drastically different. The Mongols had coalesced into a cohesive confederated nation governed by reformed nomadic rules and a strictly enforced civil and military discipline.[72] The nation was backed by a well-organized army that had adapted new military skills from their steppe wars as well as from encounters with the armies of the settled areas. It had emerged during the long years of the steppe wars. Most of its soldiers and officers had fought for Chinggis Khan over three decades, and he had established close bonds with them. It evolved into a formidable military machine that not only brought competing tribal warriors together but also served as a nation-building mechanism, giving a new identity to the isolated tribal herdsmen and providing them with a universal sense of belonging to a world-conquering people.[73] The Mongols not only refined the traditional battlefield tactics of the steppes, which were based on mobility and encirclement conducted by mounted archers;[74] they also acquired siege engines, explosives, and technical expertise, which added significantly to the effectiveness of their military.

On the other hand, the Khwarazm-Shahids Empire looked vast on the map but was weak and disjointed inside. The expansion of the empire was rapid, but its consolidation into a cohesive state had yet to occur. The empire possessed a 400,000-strong army, but it was an odd assortment of different national contingents dominated by the nomadic Qanquli and Qipchaq Turks from the area between the Aral and Caspian Seas, whose horse archery skills made them the best soldiers of the army. The predatory nature of the Qipchaq and Qanquli mercenaries undermined the morale of other native contingents. Further, the sultan was in open conflict with Abbasid Caliph al-Nasir in Baghdad, whose lack of spiritual support and hostility undermined the legitimacy of the sultan in the eyes of his Muslim subjects.

Having overwhelmed his rival powers in Asia, Chinggis Khan saw no immediate threat to his dominions in the east and sized up with inquiring interest the rival power to the west for his future schemes. Khwarazm-Shah had his own ambitions for expanding his empire to the east. After annexing parts of the Qara Khitai territories in Transoxiana, he was vying for influence in east Turkistan and dreaming of conquering China. The initial cordial diplomatic exchanges between the two powers and their mutual interest in commercial ties turned into violent confrontation when a large group of Mongol-sponsored merchants was massacred by Khwarazm-Shah's trusted governor of Otrar and Khwarazm-Shah failed to punish the perpetrator as requested by the Mongol Khan. The sultan's ruthless answer was to murder one of the three envoys and burn the beards of the remaining two. War was now inevitable, and a *quriltai* (council) called by Chinggis Khan determined to go to war against Khwarazm-Shah.

Swarming Westward

In 1219, Chinggis Khan moved west in the long march to the Khwarazmian lands, arriving on the border of the rival power in just three months, rather than the expected four. The size of his army is exaggeratedly put at 600,000 to 700,000 by contemporary Muslim chroniclers.[75] Modern estimates suggest a much smaller force numbering between 150,000 and 200,000, of which at least 15,000 were part of the army's engineer parks.[76]

The Mongol military consisted entirely of cavalry, which was suitable for fast-paced combat on the steppes. Most of it was a lightly mounted force with six of every ten troopers being light cavalry horse-archers. The remaining four were heavier cavalry with lances for close combat after the archers had disrupted the enemy ranks. Each Mongol trooper

usually maintained three or four horses, which they changed often in order to travel at fast pace for days without stopping or wearing out the animals.

As in many medieval armies in the region, the Mongol army was organized on the decimal system: the smallest unit was a section of ten troops (*arban*; Persian *daha*) and the largest unit was the *tumen*, a division of 10,000 troops that could operate as an independent force.[77] An elite force called *kishik* or *kishig* (the guards) was senior to all units.

The strategy of the mobile horde depended on maneuver, on rapid communication, and on practiced tactical moves that could be strung together into different sequences of surprise. Nevertheless, no nomadic military conquest has ever succeeded in establishing the supremacy of the nomad culture over the sedentary way of life. The Mongol invasion was not an exception. The brutal destruction of Transoxiana and Khorasan failed to destroy the region's sedentary culture. On the contrary, one generation later, the Mongol conquerors had to change themselves and adopt the way of life of the people they had conquered.

Facing the massive enemy forces, Khwarazm-Shah failed to draw up a comprehensive defense plan. He is said to have had a 400,000-strong army, but part of it was tied up in Persia and Afghanistan's highlands. It was less than a cohesive and fully loyal force. Seeing few suitable strategic options, Khwarazm-Shah spread his army out in several detachments locked up in major cities along the Syr Darya River and in Transoxiana, leaving the freedom of action to the Mongols, who concentrated against separate targets and destroyed them sequentially.

Chinggis Khan's invasion unfolded in four phases. In the first phase he reduced the border cities along the Syr Darya, hoping to draw Khwarazm-Shah out of his defenses and into a major battle. In the second phase the bulk of the Mongol army crossed the Syr Darya River and conquered and

destroyed the main centers of enemy power, including the capital Samarkand. In the third phase the Mongol army crossed the Amu Darya into Khorasan and destroyed the main cities of the area, including Balkh, Merv, Nishapur, and Herat. His fourth phase involved mopping up and defeating the final resistance in Khorasan and Afghanistan. These phases were completed in four years, from 1219–1223.

The Invasion of Khorasan

The rapid fall of the Transoxiana cities to the enemy, including Bukhara, shocked Khwarazm-Shah. In utter panic, he decided to leave his capital, Samarkand and Transoxiana, and move west, hoping to muster a new force for a comeback. Hearing the news of the sultan's flight, Chinggis Khan dispatched three divisions, or *tumens* (30,000 troops), under his three generals, Subedai, Chepe, and Toquchar, to pursue him as long and as far as necessary. Khwarazm-Shah's relentless flight and the Mongol generals' wild chase were a major accomplishment for the Mongols. Although the Mongol generals Subedai and Chepe never caught up with the fugitive king, who soon died in his refuge on a Caspian Sea island, they extended the Mongols' reach to vast areas in the west, paving the way for their later incursions into Europe.

The Mongol conquest of Khorasan, the area south and west of the Amu Darya (Oxus) down to the eastern coasts of the Caspian Sea, was a difficult and lengthy campaign, not only because of its geographic location between Persia and India and its topography, from the highlands of Hindu Kush to the lowlands of the central Iranian desert and the plains of the Helmand basin, but also due to the independent localism that required the Mongol armies to fight for every city and every fortress using drawn-out siege operations. The Mongol armies, which felt at home on the plains of Central Asia,

found themselves faced with the highlanders of Ghor, Ghazni, and Parwan at the foot of the Hindu Kush. There, they were forced to fight the first pitched battle since they had invaded the Khwarazmian territories. Khorasan was a vast area, and its political and economic power was based in four major cities—Balkh, Merv, Nishapur, and Herat. The Mongols pursued a predictable way of war in Khorasan. They usually called on the inhabitants of the targeted cities to surrender, which did not always guarantee that the lives of the people would be spared. Failing surrender, the Mongols would besiege and blockade the towns until they reduced them, in which case the inhabitants, except those who were deemed of some use for the invaders, would be massacred and their city destroyed. In order to pressure the besieged towns, the Mongol hordes would usually ravage the districts to isolate the cities politically and economically. But still, some of the besieged towns and fortresses in Khorasan and Afghanistan held out for many months and even years.

The fall of the major cities of Khorasan failed to bring an end to the anti-Mongol resistance in the country. Taking advantage of the rugged terrain and strong fortresses, many towns in Ghor, Gharjistan, Bamian, Ghazni, Parwan, and some other remote areas continued to resist repeated attacks by Mongol detachments. In the winter of 1221, Ghazna (Ghazni) the renowned center of power in medieval Afghanistan, became a thriving anti-Mongol bastion, drawing several military leaders of Khorasan who had lost their battles against the Mongols. Military activities in the city took an upsurge after the new Khwarazmian king, Sultan Jalaluddin Mungaberti (Mungberdi), headed to the town to mobilize native forces and the remnants of the old regime’s army and retake the field against the Mongol invaders.

The Battle of Parwan

The sultan was received warmly in Ghazna, where he raised a large army of 60,000 to 70,000 troops.[78] The contemporary chronicler of Jalaluddin, Mohammad Nesawi, notes that the sultan entered Ghazna with 30,000 troops, where another army of the same size joined him. Jalaluddin moved his camp to Parwan, south of the Hindu Kush, to control all major routes that extended from there to Kabul and Ghazna in the south, to Baghlan and Bamian in the north, and to Nangrahar and Peshawar in the east. In 1221 when Chinggis Khan was joined by his sons and camped for the summer in the Faryab and Jawzjan plains, he ordered a strong advance detachment of 30,000 or 45,000 troops, commanded by his adopted son Shiki-Qutuqu, to observe the activities of Jalaluddin and secure the passes across the Hindu Kush. The detachment took a direct route to the northern foot of the Hindu Kush, where one of its reconnaissance parties moved forward as far as the village of Wallian in the Andarab area and was destroyed almost to a man by Jalaluddin's forces. Shiki-Qutuqu pushed forward and crossed the Hindu Kush through the Wallian Pass and descended onto the Parwan plain near the confluence of the Ghorband and Panjsher Rivers. Now the Mongol advance forces came face to face with Jalaluddin's army. The military action in Parwan was greatly influenced by the nature of the terrain. It was not suitable for cavalry charges, a tactic that the Mongols heavily depended upon.

In early autumn 1221 the Mongol army opened the battle with an attack on the left wing of the army of Ghazna, only to receive a withering rain of arrows from the dismounted cavalry, and they were forced to retire in confusion. Next the Mongol army advanced along the entire battle line and a fierce fight between the foot archers of the army of Ghazna and the mounted Mongol warriors ensued. As soon as the Mongol attack was repulsed, Jalaluddin ordered his line to remount and charge. The result was a rapid breakdown of the Mongol ranks and their desperate struggle to withdraw

through a few narrow defiles. Jalaluddin won a complete victory; less than half of the Mongol troops escaped. The rest fell in the battle or were taken prisoner and killed after being tortured. The Battle of Parwan was the first major test of the Mongol forces' ability to face the enemy in a pitched battle on difficult terrain in Afghanistan. They lost miserably. But while Jalaluddin won the battle, he lost the game politically due to his failure to keep his army united while Chinggis Khan with his main forces was moving against him. Jalaluddin decided to retreat to the east in the hope of getting another chance to deal with the enemy.

Chinggis Khan's advance was hindered by the city of Bamian, which he stormed after a brief siege and totally destroyed. Leaving the lifeless city behind, Chinggis Khan led his army through the Ghorband Valley to Parwan. Then, moving at a breakneck speed, the Mongols headed for Ghazna with few stops on the way and when they reached the town, they learned that Jalaluddin had left fifteen days before, traveling eastward and intending to move across the Indus River. The Mongol's rapid advance through Ghazna, Gardez, and Bannu thwarted Jalaluddin's effort to rebuild his army. Chinggis Khan finally caught up with the Khwarazm army on the banks of the Indus at Kalabagh in today's Mianwali District of the Punjab Province of Pakistan.

When the Khwarazm forces reached the riverbank, the boats intended for crossing had not arrived yet, and the Mongol hordes caught up with them. Jalaluddin's 30,000 troops were pitted against a Mongol army that was more than twice as large. During an unequal battle on November 24, 1221, the Mongol hordes attacked across the entire front.[79] Being superior in numbers, the Mongol army formed an arc around Jalaluddin's battle line and outflanked the enemy forces from both sides, pushing them against the river. Seeing his position as untenable, Jalaluddin jumped on a fresh horse, threw off his armor, and raced to the Indus. His horse leaped from a bank (given variously as from 20 to

60 feet higher than the water)[80] and with his shield on his shoulder and his standard in his hand, he plunged into the Indus and safely reached the far bank. Impressed by the gallant move of his enemy, Chinggis Khan spurred to the riverbank, gazing at the fleeing prince. He could not resist admiring his defeated foe and even forbade his soldiers from shooting arrows at him. He exclaimed, “How could Shah Mohammad [Khwarazm-Shah] be the father of this man!”[81]

The Second Invasion of Khorasan

After the Indus battle, Chinggis Khan marched up the right bank of the Indus and camped in the Peshawar plain during the winter of 1222. He sent a detachment to take Multan but failed to capture it. More columns raided other valleys, chasing Jalaluddin’s allies in the region. Earlier, Jalaluddin’s victory in Parwan resonated across Afghanistan, inspiring many cities and towns to rise up against the brutal enemy. In Khorasan, Ghor, and Sistan, local rulers, who mostly acted independently after the fall of the Kwarazmian kingdom, put the Mongol-appointed governors (*shahnas*) to the sword and rose in rebellion. The resistance was particularly widespread in the mountainous track of Ghor and Gharjistan and the western city of Herat. When the news reached Chinggis Khan, he expressed his anger by saying, “From whence have these people whom I have killed come to life again?” He then ordered that henceforth “the heads of people shall be separated from their bodies, in order that they may not come to life again.”[82]

In 1222, as the Mongol Khan had camped at Parwan, separate columns of his army moved around and destroyed Ghazna, massacred Herat for the second time, and ravaged Baluchistan and Sistan. Meanwhile the year was one of the most terrible periods ever experienced by the mountain fortresses of Central Afghanistan, as the Mongols penetrated

through the most rugged districts of Ghor and Gharjistan to reduce the impregnable mountain fortresses between Ghazna and Herat. Although the Mongol detachments failed to capture any of these remote strongholds by frontal assault, they starved thousands of inhabitants to death by blockade.

Before returning to Mongolia in 1223, Chinggis Khan had destroyed more human life than any other known conqueror. In Transoxiana, Khorasan, and Afghanistan, he massacred five to six million people during four years—an average of over four thousand souls per day. Even if the figures are much exaggerated, the carnage was clearly enormous, and the disaster did not end there. For decades and centuries, the devastating aftermath of the invasion continued to take heavy tolls on the population in the affected lands. Many of those who survived in the ruined cities or took refuge in remote mountain havens must have perished from the inability to obtain shelter or food since the area could not support life and was depopulated. About a century later, Hamdullah Mustawfi described Merv by saying that “the city now is mostly in ruins.”[83] When Ibn Battuta visited the area in 1333, he described Kabul as a village and Ghazna, once the capital of a vast empire, as ruins. Rashiduddin Fazlullah, a contemporary chronicler, recorded an account of Chinggis Khan’s debate with two of his top commanders on the question “what makes a man the most happy and satisfied person?” When he was unconvinced by the views of his colleagues, he defined a man’s gratification in these words: “the greatest joy is to conquer one’s enemies, to destroy them, to seize their property, to see their families in tears, to ride their horses and to possess their daughters and wives.”[84]

Chinggis Khan died in August 1227 after defeating the Tangut kingdom. Although Chinggis Khan appointed his son Ogdai as his successor and advised his brothers against infighting, his descendants failed to resist the temptation of

competing for dominance at the expense of their kinsmen a few years after his death. Chinggis Khan divided the conquered lands among his sons at the end of his life, but there were no well-defined borders and this made infighting in later years inevitable.

During the thirteenth and the first half of the fourteenth century, the territory of today's Afghanistan was divided between the dominions of the Chaghatay khanate of Central Asia and the Ilkhanids of Persia. The western and southern provinces of Afghanistan, including Herat, Farah, Kandahar down to Baluchistan, and Sind, were ruled by the Ilkhanids while the north, northeast, and eastern parts of Afghanistan, including Balkh, Badakhshan, Kabul, and Ghazna, and eastern districts were considered part of the Chaghatay khanate. The military history of Afghanistan during this period features three major trends: clashes of rival Mongol khanates along their loosely defined borders; the struggle of native principalities to survive amid competing Mongol colonists; the massive displacement of the population and the changing social and political landscape.

By the turn of the fourteenth century, the Mongol khanates exercised waning control over their peripheries. The local Kurt dynasty, which had ruled over Herat, Ghor, and surrounding territories in Khorasan as vassal to the Mongol overlords, began in 1345 to stand up against the Ilkhanid kings and gain independence when Ilkhanid power declined. The independence of the dynasty, however, was short lived as it faced the rising power of Amir Timur (Tamerlane), who finally occupied Herat, ending the dynasty that ruled from Herat for about a century and a half.

The Decline of the Khanate and the Rise of Tamerlane

The decline of the Ilkhanid dynasty in Persia in the middle of the fourteenth century coincided with the fragmentation of the Chaghatayids' power in Central Asia. Thus the vast empire built by Chinggis Khan and his descendants disintegrated into competing regional states until another nomadic conqueror rose from the ruins of the Mongol Empire. He reconfigured the broken pieces of the Mongol dominions into a new empire that rivaled that of Chinggis Khan in territorial scope and in its lasting impact on societies throughout Asia. Amir Timur, known to the West as Tamerlane, rose to imperial power at the end of the fourteenth century, bringing under his rule a massive area that extended from Turkey in the west to India in the east.

The rise of Timur to power amid the turmoil of Transoxiana and Persia in the second half of the fourteenth century has long fascinated students of medieval Islamic history. Timur's ascent from a petty tribal standing to a world-class conqueror in a relatively short time makes the story of his life intriguing for both scholars and the general public. The very name of "Tamerlane" has invoked legendary imaginations. He is the protagonist of Christopher Marlowe's dramatic epic *Tamburlaine the Great* (1590) and Edgar Allan Poe's "Tamerlane" (1827).

What makes Timur's life and his military exploits remarkable is the way he roller-coastered to the heights of authority, first to the top of his tribe, the Burlas, then to control the Ulus Chaghatay, and finally to conquer most of the known world. His ability to build an enormous military machine almost from scratch facilitated his sweeping military conquests and made him the master of vast territories extending from Central Asia to Anatolia and from Russia to India. Ulus Chaghatay, where Timur began his career, was a loose confederation of Turko-Mongolian tribes that came into being with the break-up of the Chaghatayid khanate after 1334. The Chaghatayid khanate included the territory of Chinggis Khan's second son, Chaghatay, which

extended from the Issyk Kul Lake and the Ili River in the east to the Muslim lands of Central Asia and Transoxiana in the west. Cultural rifts and internal disputes among the Turko-Mongolian tribes that inhabited the eastern and western areas of the khanate led to its split into two parts. The western segment consisting of Transoxiana and the territories south of it, including Balkh, Qunduz (Kunduz), Baghlan, and Kandahar, became known as Ulus Chaghatay. The eastern part became known as Jatah or Mughulistan. The Ulus Chaghatay was initially ruled by the khans of the Chaghatayid house and then by a succession of tribal leaders, or amirs, who usually ruled in the name of puppet khans.

The core of Amir Timur's army was from the main Tatar tribes, including the mighty Barlas, kin of the amir. It was mostly a mounted force with each trooper supplied two horses for uninterrupted mobility. The bow was the most important weapon. The troopers carried long bows for use on foot and short bows for mobile use from the saddle. Contemporary chroniclers talk of the use of incendiary "fire pots." This may have been gunpowder or a naphtha compound. The spears used by the Tatar soldiers were sometimes the light ten-foot lance with a small tip. Other shorter and heavier spears had an iron knob on the butt, intended for smashing through armor. Most of the riders carried iron maces.[85] Timur's siege engines were portable and carried by pack animals. The engines were capable of reducing the strongest fortresses, such as the Tatars faced in Kalat and Tikrit.[86]

The Conquest of Afghanistan

The countries surrounding Timur's power base were politically and militarily fragmented and easy to conquer. In Afghanistan, the northern and eastern provinces were ruled

by several Turko-Mongol warlords who eventually submitted to Timur. In the west, the government of the Kurt dynasty (centered in Herat) had freed itself from the sway of the waning Ilkhanid rule but was locked in a power struggle with another local dynasty—the Sarbadaran of western Khorasan, which had also emerged after the decline of the Ilkhanid rule.

When Timur launched his campaign in April 1381, the whole area across western Khorasan was in a defiant mood. The Tatar army was not short on enemies and had to fight for every town. The battle for the region turned into a series of bloody encounters in fortified towns that lasted for several years. In the course of these events, Timur conquered Herat and Sistan, only to return more than once to quell repeated revolts by the local populations. From Sistan, Timur led his army east across the Helmand River to Bust and Garmsir. Contemporary accounts suggest that Timur reduced certain towns and fortresses in upper Helmand and Urozgan, where he encountered elements of *hazara* and *sadha* military-tribal units that had settled in the area during the Chinggis Khan invasion and later during the Chaghatayid period.[87] Further east, the Afghan (Pashtun) tribes of the Suleiman Mountains defied Timur's rule, stirring the Tatar amir to lead a punishing expedition against their mountain abode. Then Timur captured Kandahar, hanged its governor, and ordered the destruction of the fortress of Qalat.

During the next 20 years, Timur's armies triumphantly marched through the plains of Persia, the mountains of the Caucasus, and the vastness of Mesopotamia, Levant, and Anatolia. Timur invaded northern and southern Persia during two separate campaigns. Besides conquering the territories of the defunct Ilkhanid and Chaghatayid khanates, Timur led two major campaigns in the west and two in the east. To the west he fought the Golden Horde and crushed the rising power of Osmanli Turks (Ottoman) in Turkey. In the east, he conquered northern India and sacked Delhi and attempted to

conquer China. The military and political consequences of his victory over the Golden Horde were decisive, as it finally fragmented the Mongol khanate. But his crushing defeat of Ottoman sultan Bayezid Yildirim in Angora (modern Ankara) failed to end the Ottoman Empire, which soon recovered from the shock of Timur's onslaught. Nor did Timur's conquest of India lead to the dissolution of the Delhi Sultanate, which continued under a new dynasty. And finally Timur did not survive to pursue his goal of overrunning China, although he had dispatched a 200,000-strong army across the Syr Darya to lead the campaign.

Timur was the last of the great nomad conquerors and yet many of his military feats stem from his association with settled areas. This makes him different from other nomad conquerors, who originated in the steppes and conquered the settled lands.[88] Timur's Turkic tribes conquered the region, yet Timur formed his empire by manipulating both steppe and sedentary traditions and institutions. Timur kept close ties with his tribe, Barlas, and other Turko-Mongolian groups of Transoxiana throughout his life. Militarily, he was more related to the nomadic elements than settled areas, whose resources he used to further his empire-building effort. As Beatrice Forbes Manz suggests, the Ulus Chaghatay khanate was of central importance to Timur's life since its nomads made up the core of his army and its traditions determined his goals.[89]

The Timurid Empire

After Timur's death, his son Shah-Rukh ultimately succeeded to power following an interregnum of four years. Making Herat his imperial capital, Shah-Rukh appointed his son, Ulugh Beg, the governor of Transoxiana (with its capital in Samarkand) and set about with major projects to restore the damage caused by years of war and bloodshed. The

rehabilitation amounted to a comprehensive physical, social, and cultural revival of the conquered lands, healing the wounds inflicted by Timur's destructive sword. Politically, Shah-Rukh was able to rule over the greater part of the empire built by his father and successfully bring rebelling princes back into line and submission. Timurid rulers continued to dominate Persia, Afghanistan, India, and much of Central Asia, though the Anatolian and Caucasian territories were lost by the 1430s.

Shah-Rukh was succeeded by his son Ulugh Beg, who could not hold power long. The Timurid dynasty saw a gradual disintegration of the empire. Internally the Timurid princes quickly fell into disputes and civil wars, and many of the governorships became effectively independent. Externally the vassal states broke away, and new powerful dynasties emerged in Persia and Central Asia. In the west, the Turkmen dynasties of Qara Qoyunlu (Black Sheep) and Aq Qoyunlu (White Sheep) alternately dominated eastern Anatolia and northwestern Persia. The Caucasus broke away.

Amid the ongoing turmoil, Abu Sa'id, a grandson of Timur's third son, Miran-Shah, seized power and mounted the throne of Samarkand in 1452. During the next 15 years, he defeated every rival and emerged as the unquestioned master of Transoxiana. But this did not last long and he faced his death by the enemies in his family. Toward the end of the fifteenth century, Abu Sai'id's grandson, Babur Mirza, who had succeeded his father as the ruler of the Andijan principality at the age of 12, emerged as a major actor on the political scene in Transoxiana. Meanwhile in Herat, the last of the Timurid princes and the greatest patron of arts, Sultan Hussein Bayqara (1568–1506), presided over the prospering center of Khorasan. Supported by his illustrious Vizier Amir Ali Sher Nawai, he turned his capital, Herat, into a major center of arts and literature that sponsored many great names, including the world-class miniature painter Behzad, the poet Jami, and the historian Mirkhwand.

By 1500, the divided Timurid Empire had lost control of most of its territory and in the following years was effectively pushed back on all fronts. Persia fell quickly to the Shi'ite Safavid dynasty of Shah Ismail I, who ruled during the following decade. Much of the Central Asian lands were overrun by the Uzbeks under Mohammad Khan Shaybani, who conquered the key cities of Samarkand and Herat in 1505 and 1507 and founded the Shaybani dynasty.

Meanwhile, in the course of the ongoing family rivalries, Babur was dislodged from his home in Ferghana as well as from his other territories in Transoxiana. After years of wandering (*qazaqilar*) he reappeared on the scene and temporarily seized control of Samarkand, only to be defeated in 1501 by his most formidable rival, Shaybani. Three years later, at the head of a new army made up mostly of Badakhshani troops, he crossed the Hindu Kush and captured Kabul from its local Turko-Mongol ruler. It was from his base in Kabul that he eventually invaded India and defeated Sultan Ibrahim Lodi of the Afghan Lodi dynasty. His victory at Panipat in 1526 founded the Mughal Empire of India, or, more precisely, the Second Timurid Empire.

The Decline of the Gunpowder Empires and the Emergence of the Afghan State

The military history of Afghanistan in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is marked by a three-way persistent struggle for dominance among the three regional powers that carved up the territory of today's Afghanistan into separate spheres of control. As the Safavids of Persia (1501–1722), the Mughal Empire of India (1526–1857), and the Uzbek khanate of Central Asia (1500–1876) fought on their peripheries for dominion inside Afghanistan, the native population fought a desperate struggle for survival. They did survive; the empires did not.

During the first part of this period of Afghanistan's history, the political situation was dominated by the military action of competing empires aimed at securing their land holdings against the incursions of their rival powers. Most of the military operations were inspired by security imperatives, since Afghanistan was situated on the region's geopolitical fault line. The three-way power struggle centered on three subregional domains:

- the Uzbek-Safavids battleground in Khorasan in the northwest;
- the Safavids-Mughal arena in Kandahar in the southwest;
- the Uzbek-Mughal front line in Badakhshan and Balkh in the northeast.

In the first subregion, the Safavids fought the expansion of the Uzbeks to the key cities of Khorasan, including Herat, Mashhad, and Nishapur. The second domain was the battleground of the Safavids and the Mughal Empire for control of Kandahar, which stood on the southern route to the Mughal's dominions in India. In the north and northeast, the Mughal Empire of India was engaged in fierce competition with the Uzbeks for the control of Balkh and Badakhshan. Certain areas were under the firm control of one or another competing state. Kandahar changed hands several times between the Safavids and the Mughals, but the former never challenged the authority of the latter in Kabul. Further, the Mughals never intended to expand as far west as Herat, which was often under the Safavids domination. In the north, the Uzbeks and the Mughals fought persistently for control of Badakhshan and Balkh, but the Uzbeks rarely crossed the Hindu Kush Mountains into the Mughal's dominions in the south while the Mughal rulers practically gave up any ambition to make inroads into their ancestral home north of the Amu Darya River. So during the sixteenth

and seventeenth centuries, the subregional power struggles pitted different contending states in the region against one another.

The military actions by the troika in and around Afghanistan, however, were not the main thrust of their strategies but were mostly supporting actions. The Safavids' main effort was concentrated in the west and northwest, where they faced the expanding authority of the Ottoman Empire and Tsarist Russia. The Mughal Empire was heavily involved in expanding and consolidating its power across the vastness of the Indian subcontinent and was interested in keeping its links to Central Asia through Afghanistan secured and unchallenged by the neighboring states. The Uzbek khanate's main strategic vulnerability was to the north and northeast, where it faced the growing Kazak khanate (1456–1847) beyond the Syr Darya River and the rising power of the Oirat Empire (1619–1858) of western Mongols, based in northwest China and eastern Turkistan. All these competing powers were trying to keep their adjoining peripheries stable and safe inside Afghanistan. The trends of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century military history in Afghanistan should be studied in this context.

The Afghan Tribes and the Mughal Empire

Among the major players of this period, the Mughal Empire was most engaged in Afghanistan and with the Afghan tribes for several reasons. First, the vital territorial link between the Mughal's Indian dominions and their natural power base in Kabul and northern Afghanistan was controlled by the Afghan tribes, who constantly attempted to block the passage of the Mongol armies. Second, when confronting the Safavids in the south and the Uzbeks in the north, the Mughals needed to enlist the support of the Afghan tribes. And finally, the Mughals initially built their state in northern India on the

ruins of the Lodi Afghan dynasty. This dynasty was defeated by Babur in 1526 at the Battle of Panipat. The Afghan tribes never gave up on their efforts to regain power in Delhi and continuously defied the authority of the Mughals in their mountainous abode west of the Indus River. In India the Afghans briefly drove the Mughals out of India and established the Suri Empire under Sher shah (1540–1555) until they were overthrown by Babur's son Humayun, who returned to power with assistance from the Safavids in 1555. In the tribal areas west of the Indus, the Afghan tribes fought successive Mughal imperial armies in the second half of the sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth.

The struggle of the Afghan tribes against the Mughal Empire was an asymmetric war pitting a conventional imperial military machine against fragmented tribal militias in a rugged, hilly country between the Indus and the Hindu Kush. The tribes were able to inflict heavy losses on imperial armies but never succeeded in cutting the strategic links between Attock and Kabul for an extended period. They leveraged their ability to disrupt the Mughal operations in order to negotiate better local deals with the imperial forces. The Mughals never succeeded in establishing firm control over the hilly country of Swat, Bajaur, Buner, Tirah, Waziristan, Paktia, Kunar, and the mountainous tract east of Kabul, but they were able to exploit the internal tribal feuds by making separate deals with the clansmen and enlisting the cooperation of the willing against the irreconcilable.

Militarily, the Mughal army was powerful in numbers, discipline, and equipment. It was strong in cavalry and artillery and other technical assets. But it was hampered by a heavy baggage train that made it vulnerable in fighting in remote areas with lengthy lines of communications. On the other hand, the limited mobility of the clansmen and their small mounted forces limited their capacity to expand their tactical achievements into strategic gains and face the conventional forces of the Mughals in the open. The Afghans

mostly relied on tribal militias, which were mobilized during the war but were hard to keep together for long. Most of the militia forces comprised foot soldiers. Abul Fazl-i-'Allami in *Ain-i-Akbari* (the Institutes of Akbar) listed the strength of tribal militias during the Akbar reign as having a predominance of footmen.[90]

The Indian soldiers often panicked when facing the hill men in mountains or when hit by the bitter-cold weather of the frontier. But the empire had the ability to recruit from the "martial races" in order to employ them against similarly tough enemy fighters. They used the hardy Rajput fighters against the Afghans and fought the Rajputs using Afghan highlanders recruited in Afghanistan. They used different clans of martial races against one another. For example, they beat the Yousafzais using their Khattak kinsmen and punished the Khattaks using their Bangash rivals. In Rajasthan, they used to fight the Rajputs of Mewar by using their fellow tribesmen from Bikaner and Jodhpur.

What the Mughals failed to achieve on the battlefield was compensated for by political means. In the words of Aurangzeb they were "breaking two bones by knocking them together."[91] It is not surprising that the son of the Yousafzai chieftain Bahaku, whose father fiercely fought against the Mughals, was appointed as a ranking officer in the Mughal army by Emperor Shah Jahan, while Bahram, the son of the Afghan poet-warrior Khoshal Khattak, the irreconcilable enemy of the Mughals, was promoted by Aurangzeb to a high rank and was tasked with fighting against his militant father. In the words of Khoshal, "these offices and these awarded gifts are all snoozes and snares for men."[92]

The Afghan Tribes and the Safavid Empire

In the west, during 200 years of Safavid-Mughal competition over control of Kandahar, the Persians prevailed in the

province more than half the time. However, the Persian domination was intermittent, as the province changed hands several times. Kandahar Province at the time extended from the border of the Mughal *subah* (province) of Kabul (between the Indus River and the town of Muqur, southwest of Ghazni) to the plains of Helmand and Farah. The cooperation of the Afghan tribes, or the lack thereof, with the imperial forces played a key part in the victory or defeat of the contending powers. The Afghan tribes in the Kandahar Province had been under the domination of Turko-Mongol rulers since the Chinggis Khan's invasion in the thirteenth century. However, the tribes maintained their internal autonomy in areas out of the reach of the Turko-Mongol ruling powers, which were centered in major cities. The tribes established multichannel rapports with the ruling dynasties. At the turn of the eighteenth century the Ghilzais were the most powerful tribal confederation in Kandahar. Their rival, the Abdalis, was forced to move and settle in Herat Province by Shah Abbas Safavi in the early seventeenth century. This move was in response to their rebellious nature.

In 1694, Shah Suleiman Safavi was succeeded by his mild-mannered son, Shah Sultan Hussein (d. 1726), who had little influence over his competing ministers and court nobles. The shah was a devoted Shi'a Muslim and ordered the strict observance of religious tenets across the state. The Safavid religious persecution of non-Shi'as, which had been relaxed for some time, resumed in a more stringent and violent form during the reign of Shah Sultan Hussein. The shah was greatly influenced by the renowned Shi'a theologian Shaikh-ul-Islam Mohammad Baqer Majlisi, who was a strong supporter of Shi'a proselytization within the Sunni communities. The uprising of the Hotaks and Abdalis of western Afghanistan in the early eighteenth century that led to the invasion and occupation of Persia by the Afghans (1722–1729) was partly motivated by sectarian disputes.[93]

In Kandahar, the Afghan tribes led by the respected Ghilzai chief of the Hotak clan revolted against Persian domination in 1709, killed the Safavid governor George XI, known in Persian as Gurgin Khan, defeated his troops, and declared the independence of Kandahar. His example was followed a year later by the Abdali Afghans in Herat, who successfully ended the Safavid domination over the province. In the next five years (1709–1714), the Afghan tribes in Kandahar held their own and were able to defeat several Safavid military expeditions to regain control of the province. Mir Wais Khan united the Afghans, who acknowledged him as the supreme leader of the nation. He established the government institutions and organized a national army and its support elements. Uninterested in royal titles, he served as the top national figure until his death in November 1715. The Afghans maintained not only their independence in Kandahar and Herat for the next 30 years but also expanded their territory to the west.

Afghans Conquer Persia

During the next few years the Afghan government in Kandahar expanded its rule westward to Farah and Kirman. Tempted by the Safavids' weaknesses caused by poor administration, corruption, and infighting among the court nobles, Shah Mahmud Hotak, the young son of Mir Wais Khan who ascended the throne at age 18 in 1717, decided to invade Persia and capture Isfahan, the center of an empire that had enslaved the Afghans intermittently over the past one and a half centuries. The drive behind the project was more emotional than it was a cool-headed strategic calculation. It was the deathbed wish of Mir Wais Khan, who advised his descendants to be "no longer subject to the Persians . . . and occupy Isfahan itself."[94] Conquering the Safavids and occupying Isfahan may have been the easy

part, particularly as Persia was on the path of major political and military decline. The hard part, however, was holding the conquered lands in the face of a hostile population and limited access to manpower and other resources while far away from home base. Furthermore, the Hotaks of Kandahar had yet to raise sufficient funds to organize and equip an effective army and its support elements.

The Battle of Gulnabad

What stands out in the saga of the Afghans' invasion of Persia and the Persians' counterinvasion 16 years later is the military distinction of the Battle of Gulnabad (March 8, 1722), where a lightly armed and poorly equipped Afghan army decisively defeated a strongly armed but unmotivated Safavid army more than twice its size. In weapons and equipment the odds were far more striking. On the one hand, the Persian soldiers looked fresh and splendid with their battle dress, equipment, tents, and sleek horses. On the other hand, the rugged Afghans were clothed in tatters and simply armed and camped in the open with hardly a tent to cover them. Their horses were lean and their camels were scattered and grazing. Eyewitnesses observed that throughout their whole camp nothing glittered "but their swords and lances."[95] Some Persians and outsiders compared the scene to the Battle of Qadisiyyah, fought between the Muslim-Arab army and the Sassanid Persian army over nine centuries back (636 AD), where a poorly equipped Muslim army decisively defeated the luxuriously equipped Persian forces.[96]

While the Afghan army was at the gates of Isfahan, the Safavid ministers were deeply divided on how to respond to the challenge. Had the Persians defended the city of Isfahan, they would have worn out the Afghan forces before the walls, as they were incapable and unskilled in siege warfare.

However, calling the Afghans “a bunch of raiders and plunderers” that could be easily crushed in the battle outside Isfahan by the superior Persian army, the dominant view at the court convinced the shah, who approved the decision to face the Afghan army in the field.

On March 7, 1722, the Persian army, consisting of 50,000 men and a train of 24 artillery pieces, moved out of Isfahan to face the Afghan camp at Gulnabad. The opposing armies drew battle lines on the following day, where the Persian right wing was commanded by Rustam Khan, the general of the royal guards, and the left was under Prime Minister Mohammad Quli Khan. The *Wali* of Arabia joined the right wing with his Arab contingent while Ali Mardan Khan, the *Wali* of Loristan, augmented the left wing with his 500 followers. Both wings entirely comprised mounted troops and numbered 30,000. The 20,000-strong infantry forces, with muskets and artillery, were deployed in the rear center, forming a separate line facing the open space between the two wings. The Safavids had good cannons but not many good gunners. On the eve of the battle, the Shah’s agents were asking the European trader companies based in Persia to detail their gunners to the Persian army with little results.[97] Shah Mahmud Hotak had drawn up his army in four divisions, with the right wing commanded by Amanullah Khan and the left wing under Nasrullah Khan with his Zoroastrian contingents. He himself took charge of the center being supported by the best fighting men. The fourth division consisted of 100 pieces of light artillery, the Zanbouraks, which were deployed in the rear of the right flank. Zanbouraks were light guns that were transformed into mobile camel-mounted artillery by the Afghans of Kandahar in the early eighteenth century to achieve a combination of mobility and firepower.[98] As the two armies lined up Mahmud rode through his ranks, reminding them that “the plunder of Isfahan is your reward, if you conquer; if you are defeated,

you have no retreat, and you must then meet death, embittered by disgrace."[99]

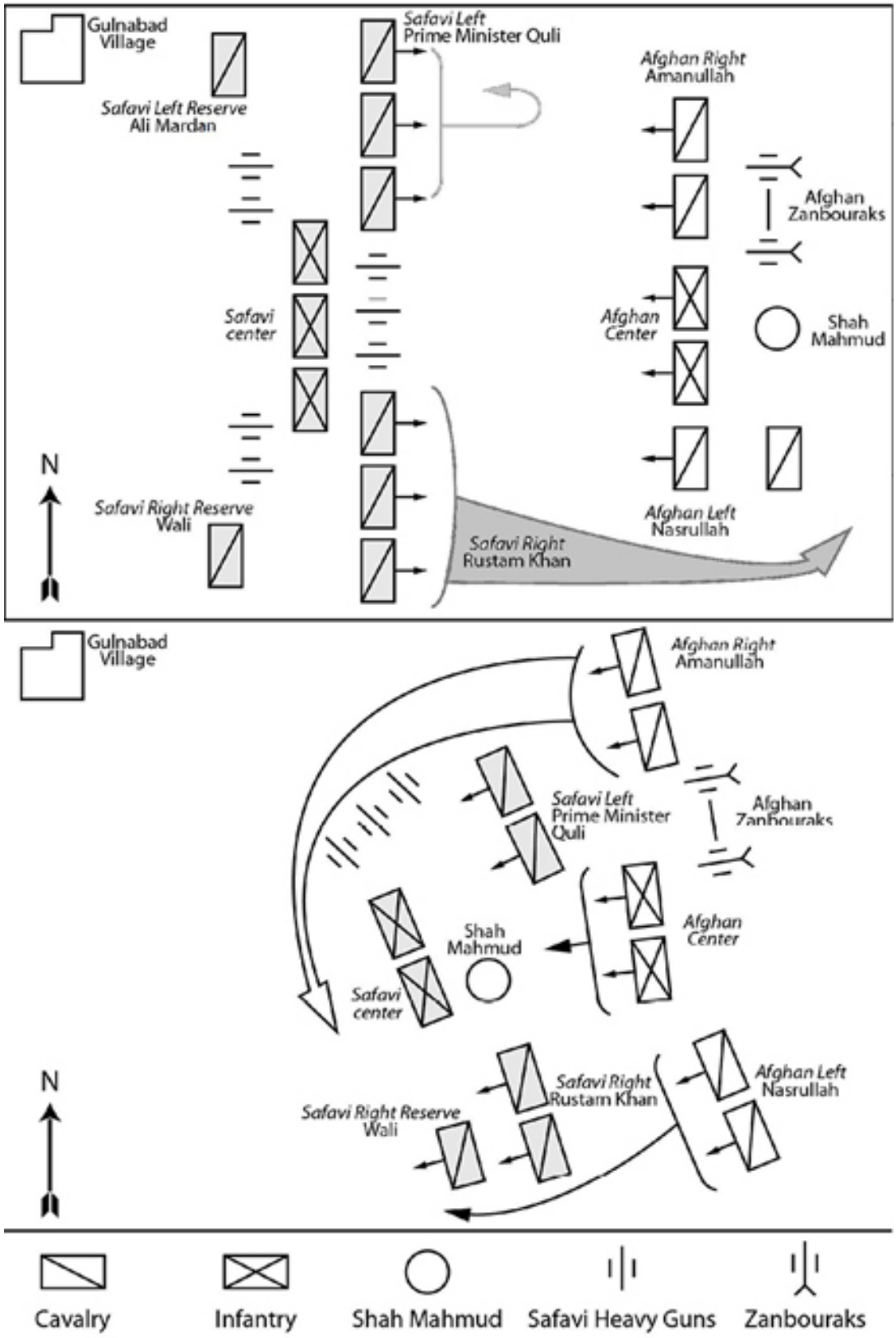
The Battle at Gulnabad began as a running battle where the cavalry of both sides played the key role by outmaneuvering the opposing forces and knocking them off balance with outflanking movements. The Persian heavy artillery failed notably while the camel-mounted Afghan light guns proved the decisive weapons that sealed the fate of the day. The battle opened at noon with a cavalry charge by the Persian right wing against the Afghan left. The Persians drove the Afghans back. Simultaneously, the forces under the *Wali* exploited the breakthrough by turning around the Afghan left wing and falling on its camp and plundering it. Busy with looting, the Arabs failed to hold the ground they had secured. By shifting forces from the center, the Afghans contained any further break-up of the left wing.

Meanwhile, the Persian left wing, under the prime minister, charged the Afghan right, led by the veteran Afghan commander Amanullah Khan. Facing the galloping enemy horsemen, the Afghan forces, instructed by Mahmud, conducted a clever maneuver by opening their lines to allow Persian riders to pass through exposing them to the 100 camel-mounted Zanbouraks that were lined up in the rear. A barrage of swivel fire caused great havoc within the ranks of the Persian horsemen and turned them into a disorganized mob fleeing the field.[100] Seeing the enemy columns in disarray, the Afghan right wing launched its deadly assault and charged the reeling enemy columns. As the Persian cavalry fled, the pursuing Afghans wheeled to the rear of the Persian artillery, which had no escort and whose guns had not even discharged once.[101] The gunners were cut to pieces and the guns turned on the Persian infantry, which also broke up and fled. At that point, the Persian army had lost only 2,000 men, but it turned around and fled ignominiously. In the words of Sykes, "the Persian nation had ceased to be

virile, and the verdict of history is that when it fell, it fell deservedly through its own cowardice."[102] The diary of the Dutch East India Company based in Persia entered on March 8:

> in the evening after the stroke on nine we were suddenly appraised of the fact that the E'temad al-Douleh, and other army elements had fled into the city bringing tidings that the Persians had been defeated and about 4,000 to 5,000 of them killed with Ali Mardan Khan taken Prisoner and that Mahmud now had complete command of the field and had acquired the cannons, money and all the other baggage.[103]

The Battle of Gulnabad, 1722



The Battle of Gulnabad, 1722.

The Afghan forces failed to pursue the retreating enemy forces that could complete their defeat. The victors busied themselves with plundering the Persian camp.

After the Battle of Gulnabad, the Afghan king Mahmud faced the enormous challenge of forcing the capitulation of Persia. This did not seem achievable without reducing its capital Isfahan. In spite of the lack of the Afghan army's skills and technology for a long siege, Mahmud deployed his army to blockade the capital and force it to submit through starvation. The plight of over 600,000 citizens inside the blockade was dramatized in the account of Krusinski and Shaykh Hazin, both of whom were in Isfahan during the siege. As supplies to the city stopped, the inhabitants who had not stocked up on stores faced a deepening famine that took a heavy toll on the population. People were eventually forced to feed on dead animals, including dogs and cats, on the leaves and bark of trees, and on leather, which they softened by boiling. Some resorted to cannibalism.[104] Krusinski estimates that about 20,000 people perished in the battle and another 100,000 citizens died of famine.[105] As the crisis continued, the population turned against the shah and his ministers for their indecisiveness. After successive failures to break the blockade, Shah Sultan Hussein, under popular pressure, abdicated on October 22, 1722, and surrendered his throne to the Afghan monarch. The next day Shah Mahmud entered Isfahan as the new shah of Persia. He now faced the enormous challenge of ruling an empire threatened internally and externally.

The Road to Glory and the Path to Disaster

The real challenge faced by the Afghans was how to rule and govern a vast country while detached from their divided

power base in Afghanistan. Even though the Afghans won an easy victory against all odds in the battle, translating their tactical achievement into strategic gains was an enormous challenge and not easy to undertake. They were in a hostile land with little access to local elements of power. Their enemies had the potential to mobilize enormous political, financial, military, and public sources of power against them over time, while they were a long way from home. Their power base back home had not been fully consolidated to support long-term conquests in a foreign country. True, the Safavids were losing control over far-flung provinces and were less capable of a massive mobilization of the people against the Afghans. But this was a temporary condition. In a country so vast, rich, and closely knit socially as Persia, winning single battles or capturing the capital did not guarantee the enduring rule of a foreign conqueror merely through the limited use of arms. The resort to arms to establish control entailed violence, which led to growing counterviolence, leading to anticonqueror popular mobilization. This was what the Hotaks eventually faced in Persia.

During nearly eight years of occupation, Shah Mahmud Hotak and his successor, Shah Ashraf (ruled 1725–1729), faced dwindling resources and increasing public resentment against the Afghans' domination. Frustrated by increasing revolts and the decreasing number of the occupation army, the Afghan leaders resorted to sheer force, brutality, and escalating violence. The systematic application of this policy contributed to the mobilization of other forces in Persia against the Afghan's domination and to its violent termination in less than a decade. The Afghan military forces after the fall of Isfahan, about 25,000 troops, were insufficient for administering the kingdom they had won so easily. Several cities that initially submitted to the new rulers rose in resistance. Prince Tahmasp Mirza, the son of the deposed Safavid monarch, who had escaped the Isfahan

blockade, was crowned as the new shah and mobilized the Persian army for Reconquista. In 1726, Nader Quli Afshar, who formerly led the life of a brigand, adventurer, and soldier of fortune, joined Tahmasp with his 2,000 followers. Soon, the coalition of Tahmasp and Nader made significant inroads south into Khorasan and established a base for a much larger campaign. From that base the coalition reestablished the Persian influence in Herat and then moved against Shah Ashraf in Isfahan.

In less than two years (1729–1730), the combined forces of Tahmasp and Nader defeated the Afghan army in four major battles and drove Ashraf out of Isfahan. The Persian army rapidly pursued the remnants of the Afghan army to the south, giving it no respite to regroup for an organized stand in Shiraz. While the Afghan rearguard covered the escape of Ashraf, the rest of the Afghan contingents scattered in different directions and the war was over. Ashraf retired to Lar and then Sistan with a small party, where he was interdicted southwest of Kandahar by agents of Shah Hussein of Kandahar or elements of a Baluch tribe who brutally murdered him.

Such was the end of the Afghans' rule in Persia that had lasted just over seven years (October 1722–January 1730). They achieved a remarkable victory with very limited means but failed miserably to rule a fragmented country. Their poor administrative ability and lack of statecraft was apparent. They failed to unite their fellow tribesmen into building strong and numerous armies capable of enduring the occupation of a foreign land. Their nascent military organization and rudimentary administrative setup was sufficient for conquering a country under a weak, corrupt, and divided polity but incapable of governing the state they won so easily. In contrast to earlier conquerors of Persia, the Afghans did not found a strong government in a unified country of their own, with a formidable army, before launching an ambitious venture to conquer a foreign land.

Once they occupied Persia, they received little support from home to fill the ranks of their dwindling army, beset by combat losses, deaths, and desertion. Throughout their rule in Persia, they remained an alien power with a small army among a population that they antagonized by harsh means of control, including massacres, destruction, and population displacements.

The Persian Reconquista

The defeat of Shah Ashraf in Shiraz terminated the Afghan rule in Persia but did not end the hostility between Persia and the Afghan rulers in Afghanistan. In the space of five years, after capturing Herat in 1732, Nader Afshar, who was appointed commander in chief of the Persian army, reunited Persia and recovered the provinces annexed by the Ottoman Turks and Russia. He besieged Baghdad in the west and reduced Ganja in the north. In March 1735, he signed a treaty with the Russians in Ganja in which the latter agreed to withdraw all of their troops from Persian territory. Over these years, the former shepherd Afshar wielded so much power that in 1736 he deposed the last members of the Safavid dynasty and ascended the throne as Nader Shah.

A few months after his coronation, Nader Shah made serious preparations to invade Afghanistan and conquer Kandahar—the place from where the Afghan army had launched the conquest of Persia 16 years earlier. Nader left Isfahan in November 1736 with a large army of between 80,000 and 100,000,[106] mainly consisting of cavalry, on a campaign that lasted nearly a year and a half. Kandahar was under Shah Hussein Hotak, brother of Shah Mahmud, the victor of Isfahan, who had ruled independently since his brothers' death in Isfahan in 1725. Shah Hussein assembled over 30,000 troops and supplied a large quantity of provisions to Kandahar to sustain the city during a very long

siege. After initial battles west of Kandahar, the massive Persian army with its enormous baggage convoy and contingent of camp followers laid siege to the Afghan capital, which lasted about one year. During this period, the Persian army was under constant attack from within and without the city, forcing Nader to build walls and defensive towers around his camp.

Finally the Persian army surprised the defenders on Friday, March 24, 1738, by scaling a lightly held tower and pouring into the city. Once the walls were overcome, Nader pushed large bodies of his troops into the city. Shah Hussein was forced to move into the citadel, which was bombarded with heavy cannon fire. The next day, the Afghan leader made terms with Nader, who gave him quarter upon the condition that "he would surrender the town, and that his army might be recruited with those soldiers who had behaved so gallantly in the defense of the place."[107] Nader exiled Shah Hussein, the last Hotak ruler, and his followers to Mazandaran. Impressed by the valor and toughness of the Afghan fighters, Nader raised an Afghan cavalry force of 16,000, including 12,000 Abdalis and 4,000 Ghilzais. They were commanded by ten commanders, eight of whom were Abdali officers and two Ghilzai. These troops become the most trusted and favored units of Nader Shah, and they served with him in all of his military conquests.

The campaign in Kandahar cost Nader enormous resources, time, and effort. In military terms, it hardly added to his professional reputation. As a soldier, he failed to reduce a town defended by a force three times smaller than his army. His blockade of the city for more than a year failed to break the will of the besieged population, and he was eventually forced to launch scaling operations. The capture of Kandahar did send a psychological message that the Persians had finally gotten even with the Afghans by avenging the disaster of Isfahan 16 years earlier.

Following the conquest of Kandahar, Nader Shah launched his carefully planned invasion of India, matching the feat of his Turkic hero Tamerlane. The Persian army defeated the Mughal army at the monumental Battle of Karnal and Nader Shah entered Delhi, which was looted by his soldiers. The Indian conquest and the expedition into Central Asia peaked the military achievements of Nader Shah, providing him with enormous power and making him an increasingly despotic ruler. Influenced by his growing paranoia, he even blinded his own son, Reza Quli, on the suspicion of conspiracy against him. During his last years, Nader Shah acted with excessive brutality, sparking numerous revolts, which he crushed ruthlessly. He even built towers with his victims' skulls in imitation of his hero Timur. Finally, he met his violent death on June 20, 1747, in Khorasan. He was killed by his own officers, who feared Nader was about to execute them. They decided on the bloody preemption.[108]

The Durrani Empire and the Emergence of Modern Afghanistan

Following the assassination of Nader Afshar in Khorasan by his own troops, his empire was reduced into a free-for-all competition for power that lasted for more than a decade. Ahmad Khan and his fellow Abdali and Ghilzai troops, who constituted Nader's trusted corps d'elite, fought their way out of the Persian camp and, with a 16,000-strong contingent, headed to Kandahar, where an assembly of tribal leaders unanimously crowned Ahmad Khan as their king. The young leader assumed the title of Ahmad Shah Durrani.

Ahmad Shah Durrani is considered the founder of modern Afghanistan. Having learned from the Ghilzais' hollow state-building experience and their poorly supported conquest of Persia, Ahmad Shah intended to move steadily and surely to build the Afghan state and expand it in a way that, instead of

overextending his forces, augmented his power base. He saw a unique opportunity to establish a national state at home after more than seven centuries during which the states and empires in Afghanistan were built by powers that came from outside. During this period, the Afghan tribes in their rugged country and hard-to-reach valleys resisted long-lasting imperial encroachment and did preserve some level of practical autonomy.

The state structure adopted by the Durrani Empire was paradoxically based on the central control of decentralized tribal and communal military, administrative, and economic institutions. Historically such a system worked in the country only under powerful and charismatic leaders who mobilized the nation in a spirit of common cause such as foreign conquest, fighting foreign invasion, or waging ideological war. Ahmad Shah Durrani achieved such a mobilization by tapping into the *assabiyya* (social solidarity) of the Afghans, encouraging them to build a vast empire that would permanently secure the homeland of some 4.6 million Pashtuns and other tribes living between the Indus and Oxus Rivers. Further, he invoked the Islamic duty of the Afghan Muslims to protect the oppressed Muslim population of India,[109] and he claimed the hereditary right of the Afghans to the throne of Delhi.[110] The Afghan ruler mobilized and maintained the unity of the tribes and offered them the opportunity to secure their poorly resourced homeland and conquer prosperous foreign lands.

The military forces of the Durrani Empire were structured in line with the political makeup of the state. The army developed incrementally as Afghan rulers expanded the limits of the state and brought more and more people under their domination. There was a close relationship between the growth of the army and the extent of imperial expansion. Expansion required large armies and maintaining such armies required funds that had to be acquired from other areas, usually through the military invasion and conquest of

resource-rich countries. Thus, the quest for power through expansion led to the need for forming larger military forces. Further, the control of conquered lands required more military forces and the need for more funds. Therefore, the empire that Ahmad Shah Durrani founded was mostly based on military power. The Durrani army comprised a regular professional component (*Fauj-e Nizam*) and a wider pool of irregular forces (*Fauj-e Gushada*) provided by the tribal and community leaders when needed in exchange for cash payments, tax collection rights, or the allotment of fief estates proportionate to the size of the contingent each feudal chief provided. The regular army organized in regiments (*dastah*) permanently served the throne and included special elite royal regiments known by different names such as *ghula-man-e saf-shekan, resala-e shahi, ghulam-khana,* and *ghulam-e shah*. Like their medieval counterparts, these "slave" troops were made up of nontribal servicemen who were not attached to any other leader but the king. The French captain Jean Law, who visited Delhi in 1758, described the Afghan army as a highly disciplined force, which, he says, was "divided into squadrons of a thousand horsemen. Each squadron is distinguished by a cap of a different color and under the command of a chief, who invariably makes his report to Abdali himself twice a day. . . . Although the troops of Abdali are generally good, there are among them some corps that surpass the others. They are the men whose bravery has been frequently put to the proof. Every time this prince enters on a campaign he keeps apart 12 or 15 of these squadrons, it is his reserve corps, destined for the decisive strokes and of which the Maratha have felt the weight so often.[111]

Contemporary Afghan accounts list the composition of the Durrani army at the end of the eighteenth century as follows:[112] 12,000 horsemen of the *ghulaman-i saf shekan* royal guard; 30,000 Durrani and Ghilzai irregular cavalry; 2,300 tribal troops provided by the chiefs of Peshawar,

Khattak, Bangash, Mohmand, and Yousafzai; 5,000 to 6,000 men of Baluch regiments provided by the Amir of Baluchistan; 18,000 cavalry contributed by the tribes of Wardak, Suleiman Khel, Khogyani, Shinwari, Afridi, Kohati, and Chach Hazara; 12,000 royal security units (*keshikchis*); 7,000 court and household details; 2,000 Khybari and Afridi troops; 12,000 horsemen from Khorasan; and 15,000 troops from Sind, Multan, Dera Ismail Khan, and Dera Ghazi Khan. All this adds up to 115,000 to 116,000 troops.

What makes Ahmad Shah distinct from other local conquerors in the past was that he intended to conquer other lands to build his own state and not to follow the example of past Afghan rulers of India or the Hotaks, who chose to preside over empires in foreign lands. Alexander Dow (1735–1779), a British orientalist and a contemporary of Ahmad Shah, wrote that the Afghan monarch was the only leader at that time that could restore the imperial power to Delhi if he would assume sovereignty in India and rule as king from Delhi.[113] It was a tempting proposition, but the situation in India was changing and the balance of power was rapidly shifting. As Ahmad Shah's real actions indicated, he knew that getting tied up in India would undermine his plans to build an Afghan state between the Indus and Amu Darya Rivers. During 26 years of rule, he never compromised any part of this territory in order to expand to northern India or into the depths of Persia in the west.

To the west of Afghanistan, the disintegration of the Afsharid Empire and the continuing power struggle among several contenders made Persia vulnerable to outside intervention. Ahmad Shah could exploit the situation by leading his disciplined and experienced army (supported by the Afghan tribes) to make major gains in Persia. However, he was unwilling to repeat the mistake of the preceding Afghan dynasty by winning an easy victory but failing to rule the empire. Based on a similar argument, Ahmad Shah considered the Amu Darya River as the practical border of

the Afghan state in the north. In spite of the vulnerability of the Uzbek khanate caused by the continued power struggle between the Khiva, Bukhara, and Khoqand khanates, Ahmad Shah did not want to be drawn deep into Central Asia beyond the Amu Darya.

The Expansion of the Empire

Expansion through attacks on surrounding states soon became a requirement for the Afghan state, not merely to build, as some would term, a “raiding polity” and find a better distraction for his feuding and turbulent subjects, but also as a means to wield power in a very competitive environment where the “survival of the fittest” found its political meaning. Realistically, moving east was more advantageous to Ahmad Shah than venturing west into the unsettled vastness of Persia. To the east, down to the Indus River basin, the land was inhabited by fellow Afghan (Pashtun) tribes who would add to the influence and legitimacy of the Afghan state and provide a rich source of recruitment for his army of conquest. Further east, there were large pockets of Afghan tribes in India who had migrated into the subcontinent in the wake of victorious armies from Afghanistan.

Ahmad Shah’s military conquest to the east was aimed at establishing the political limits of the Afghan kingdom based on the geographic and cultural boundaries of the Afghan tribes. These borders had not been independently defined by any ruler in the past. There were also Afghans settled in the west but the largest tribal concentration was in the east down to the Indus (Sind) River. Once the Durrani armies reached the banks of the Indus and asserted their authority, Ahmad Shah turned west and annexed the Afghan provinces of Herat and Farah and secured them by establishing control over Mashhad and Nishapur in Khorasan. No border,

however, could have been secured unless the lands beyond it were stable and not threatening. With the weakening of the Mughal Empire in India and the emergence of rival contenders in the subcontinent, the edges of the Durrani state became insecure, forcing Ahmad Shah to extend his conquests far beyond the natural geography of his kingdom. In fact, rising empires are like fast-moving torrents that overflow the decaying banks of the stream.

The Conquest of India

Expansion to the east features two sets of military campaigns with monumental consequences. The first contains military actions to establish the Afghan control over Punjab that lasted until the first quarter of the next century. The second comprises Ahmad Shah's wars to defend the eastern imperial boundaries against the rising power of the Hindu dynasty of the Marathas and their allies in India.

As a result of four military conquests in India (1747–1756), the Durrani Empire established control over large territories stretching from Punjab to Delhi. The Afghan conquest came against the backdrop of the rapid expansion of the Marathas, who rose to imperial power in central and southern India in the seventeenth century and made fast inroads into northern India as the Mughal Empire declined. A confederacy of the Hindu warrior caste, the Marathas covered vast parts of the Deccan Plateau. It predominantly encompassed the modern Indian states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Karnataka. The empire was founded and consolidated in 1674 under Shivaji, who made Fort Raigad, located 175 kilometers south of Mumbai (Bombay), its capital and successfully defended his territory against the Mughal Empire during a 27-year war, until the death of Aurangzeb in 1707. Aurangzeb's successors presided over the rapid disintegration of the empire and finally the Maratha chief Baji

Rao defeated the Mughal army near Delhi in 1737 and established control over much of the former Mughal territory south of Delhi. The Marathas were inspired by the aspirations of the Hindu communities, who were frustrated with the domination of the Muslims across the subcontinent. Despite the admirable military prowess of the Marathas against the Muslim rulers of India, they did not appeal to the common public because of their arrogance, excesses, and oppression.[114] Nevertheless they raised the standard of freeing the Hindus from the yoke of the Muslim rulers, who had dominated the subcontinent for more than six centuries. The sources of the Maratha power were its highly motivated and disciplined military forces and its skills in waging effective guerrilla war against the conventional forces of their enemies. However, when they branched out from their home turf and organized their fighters in a heavy conventional army, they lost much of their advantage.

The capture of Delhi by Ahmad Shah in 1756 brought the Marathas into direct confrontation with the Durrani Empire on the edges of their claimed territories. Before returning home in 1757, Ahmad Shah reconfirmed the weak Mughal emperor Alamgir II on the throne in Delhi and appointed his fellow Indian-based Afghan leader Najib ud-Daulah his viceroy and military commander in Delhi while putting his son, Prince Timur, in charge of the provinces east of the Indus, assisted by Sardar Jahan Khan.[115]

The Maratha Challenge

During the absence of the Afghan monarch, the Maratha armies poured into Delhi and drove out Ahmad Shah’s appointed officials. Assisted by their local allies, the Maratha forces pushed further north into Punjab, forcing Prince Timor out of the province in 1758. Seeing the Marathas on the doorsteps of his kingdom, Ahmad Shah returned to India at

the head of a large army in 1759 and made several gains against separate Maratha garrisons in Punjab and around Delhi. The successive defeats of the Marathas in Punjab and around Delhi frustrated the arrogant Maratha nobles and their allies in northern India. They urged the *peshwa* (prime minister) to send a larger army to drive out the Afghans and permit the Hindus to overthrow the Muslim domination of India. In the spring of 1760, the *peshwa*, Balaji Bajirao, mobilized a huge army under the nominal command of his young son Viswasrao with the actual command exercised by Sadashiv Rao Bhao, accompanied by a large crowd of up to 300,000 noncombatants and camp followers. The slow moving army headed north, reaching Delhi on August 1, 1760, from where it moved further north to encounter the Durrani army five months later in the fateful Battle of Panipat. In order to face the main Maratha army, the Afghan leader formed a broad coalition with his Indian allies, including the Rohilla Afghans of the Gangetic Doab and the Nawab of Oudh, Shuja-u-Dawlah.[116]

The Battle of Panipat

The two armies faced each other for over two months at Panipat, an ancient historic city in India, nearly 60 miles north of Delhi. During this time, each side made attempts to cut the supply lines of the other in order to choke its logistic lifelines. Each side was trying to get the enemy into battle under conditions unfavorable to him. Having strongly entrenched in their encampment, the Marathas would have liked the Afghans to attack their camp and be pounded by their heavy guns firmly positioned on the ramparts. But Ahmad Shah was not in a hurry. He resisted his Indian Afghan allies' constant demand for immediate action, advising them to wait until he shaped the tactical situation for a favorable opportunity that would lead to a successful conclusion of the

conflict.[117] The Maratha command too tried to force the Afghans to attack by cutting off their supplies. Ahmad Shah, however, was in a better position to choke the enemy camp since the Durrani army was sitting on the supply routes of the enemy and had easy access to the resources of its Afghan allies across the Jumna.

The Maratha army with its heavy baggage trains, artillery equipment, and large hordes of families and camp followers was more vulnerable. Eyewitness accounts indicate that the camp was populated by a half million souls.[118] Bhao supplied his forces from Delhi, which was his forward logistic base. The base was replenished daily by large convoys of stores moving through a long supply route stretched from Pune to Delhi. Other sources of procurement were the districts around Delhi. The Durrani army was sitting in a key position and was able to disrupt both supply routes of the enemy. Meanwhile, Ahmad Shah kept the enemy camp under pressure by continuing cavalry attacks on its flanks and rear. Accordingly, every night a detachment of 5,000 horses would advance to the Maratha camp and keep it under surveillance until dawn.[119] Two other bodies of Afghan horses, 5,000 each, made half circles right and left around the Maratha encampment.[120] These night patrols, led by senior commanders, cut off every provision convoy that attempted to sneak into the Maratha camp and every party of camp followers that left the camp under the cover of darkness to gather firewood and fodder in the neighboring woods.

The concentration of large Maratha military forces and camp followers in the relatively limited space of the camp (six miles long and two miles wide) was causing an acute problem of lodging and hygiene, with an adverse impact on the army morale. By the first week of January 1761, the growing famine pushed the Maratha camp to the brink. The army chiefs appealed to Bhao to let the army go to battle instead of perishing through starvation and misery. They

wanted to move immediately against the Afghans and face their destiny honorably.[121]

According to the original Afghan and Indian sources, including Marathi accounts, when the cut-off of supplies and famine "cast a shadow of death on the Maratha camp," their leaders decided on January 13, 1761, to march toward Delhi, where supplies could be found and the army would be in a much stronger position to fight the Afghans.[122] Hence the battle plan was to fight their way to Delhi through potential obstruction by the Afghan forces. In order to be ready for battle from the line of march, the Maratha forces were formed into what in military terms is called the "infantry square" or "hollow square." Known from ancient times, this form of combat order was used by an infantry threatened by an enemy's cavalry charge. As noted earlier, such close-order formation was utilized by the Roman legions at the Battle of Carrhae in 53 BC against Parthia's cavalry attack. The Maratha hollow square was a wide square formed by combat troops with noncombatants moving within the square, protected by the troops around them. The Marathas put infantry with guns and muskets on the outside and moved the noncombatants, supplies, and families inside the square. With such a clumsy formation, the Maratha intended to march southeast across the field toward the Jumna River, eight to 10 miles away, and thence follow the right bank of the stream to Delhi.

The political significance of the Battle of Panipat for both sides of the conflict and the massive Maratha losses of life and property following their disastrous defeat in the battle have prompted exaggerated estimates about the size of the forces that fought on that fateful January day. The battlefield expanse, the constraints of command and control, and the logistical limitations support the estimate of modern writers, who suggest that each side deployed between 60,000 to 85,000 cavalry and infantry troops on the battlefield,[123]

excluding the baggage trains and camp followers that were estimated over a half million in the Maratha camp. Kasi Raj Pundit, who participated in the battle and recorded the event as the secretary of Nawab Shuja ud-Daulah, an ally of Ahmad Shah, visited the Maratha camp in Panipat as the nawab's envoy. He recorded the breakdown of the opposing forces, using the accounts of Maratha military *daftars* (office of musters) and his interviews with the officials there. He listed the Afghan army with 41,800 horse and 38,000 foot with between 70 to 80 cannon. Kasi Raj's estimate puts the number of irregulars who accompanied the troops at four times that of the army. These irregulars usually moved in the wake of a successful charge by the regulars to fall on the broken enemy with swords in hand to complete the rout.[124] The Maratha army contingents included 79,000 horse and 15,000 foot.[125] The number of accompanying family members and camp followers was estimated at over a half-million.

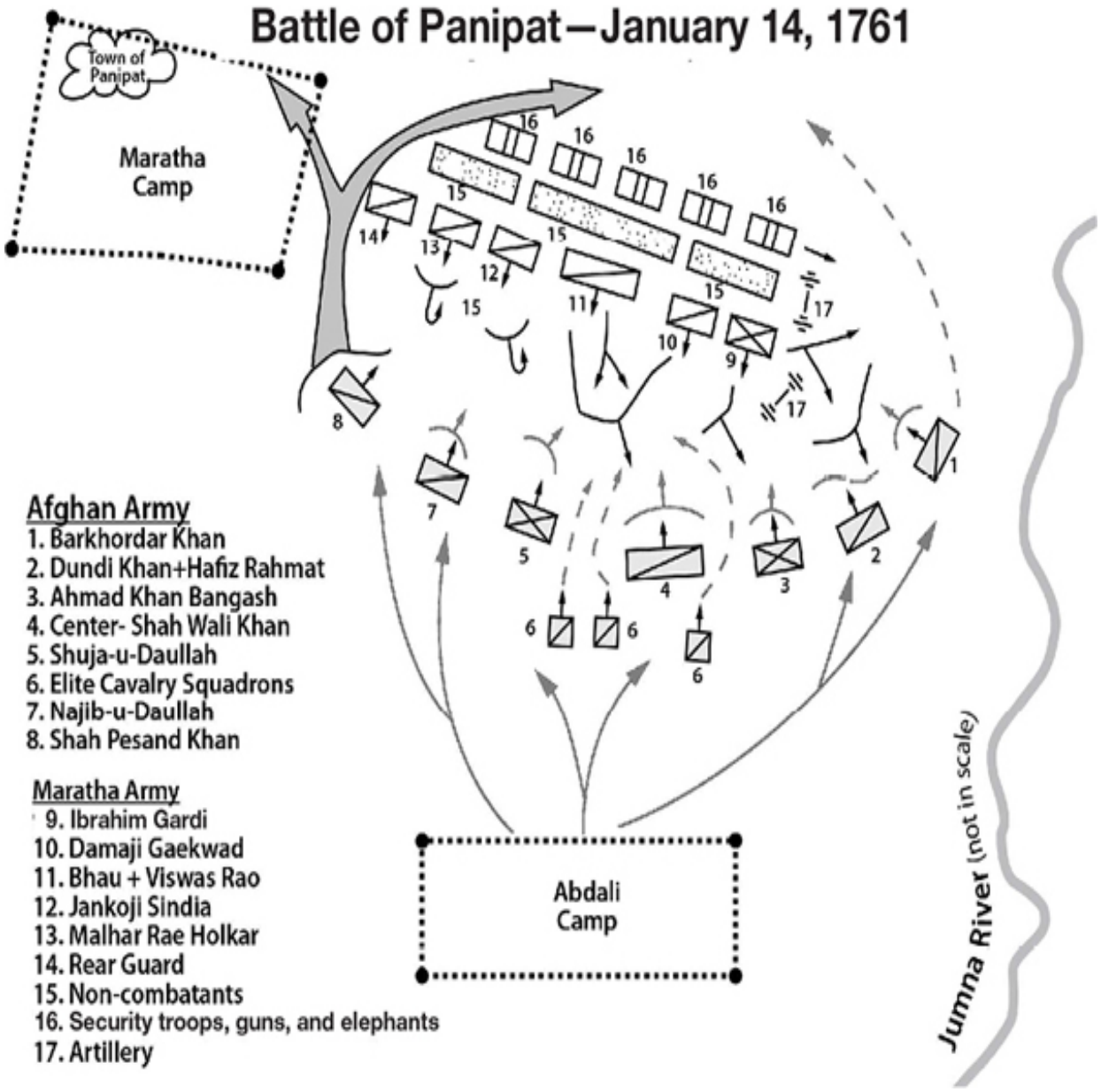
Alerted by spies about the Maratha plan, the Afghan army was ordered early on January 14 to line up and block the enemy, which had broken camp and was moving like a sea of men, animals, guns, and trains of carriages and camp followers on foot. "They slowly advanced toward the Abdali camp, with every symptom of hopeless despair rather than of steady resolution. The ends of their turbans were let loose, their hands and faces anointed with a preparation of turmeric," signifying that they came forth to die.[126] Given the sequence of the combat and the description of primary sources, the battle took place as a "meeting engagement" (in modern terms) as the Maratha columns moved southeast and hit the right flank of the Afghan line, which was seven miles long and two miles in depth and was drawn up obliquely to the Maratha line of march. Maratha sources indicate that the Maratha army had to wheel to its right to

face the onslaught. Consequently, “the last night’s plan of a square was given up.”[127]

The eight-hour battle on January 14, 1761, opened with a barrage by Maratha cannons, musketry, and rockets as they advanced southeast across the field toward the Jumna River. After the opposing forces covered the few kilometers that separated the two camps, the Maratha forward columns advanced against the Afghan right. In the ensuing close combat, the Marathas pushed the Afghan right flank back but failed to penetrate the lines. As the Afghan right was heavily engaged in fighting off the disciplined Maratha regular infantry under Ibrahim Gardi, the Maratha center under Bhao and Viswasrao charged the Afghan divisions in the center under Shah Wali Khan and broke through a line of 10,000 horse, 7,000 Persian musketeers, and 1,000 camel-mounted *Zanbouraks*. Meanwhile, on the Afghans’ left flank, Najib ud-Daulah’s 8,000 foot and 6,000 horse advanced steadily against the Maratha right under Jankoji Sindhia, which was four to five miles away from the Afghan left. The Afghan column advanced in bounds. When the wings reached the effective range of muskets and rockets, the Najib’s division unleashed a barrage of musket fire and rockets, discharging two thousand volleys at a time, which not only terrified the enemy horses with their dreadful noise but also caused so much terror that the enemy could not advance.

Around noon, Ahmad Shah decided to commit his reserves in order to stabilize the center and the right flank, which were under Maratha pressure, and push the left wing forward to outflank the enemy with a sweeping attack to his rear. He assembled every possible body of troops and his slave guard troops for a final decisive effort. He moved 4,000 troops to cover the right flank and dispatched 10,000 horse to the center to Vizier Shah Wali Khan—with instructions to charge the enemy in close order at full gallop. He ordered Najib-ud-Daulah and Shah Pesand Khan on the left flank to launch a

simultaneous attack on the enemy’s flank. About 1:00 PM the reserve joined the battle. The vizier charged the Maratha army where Bhao commanded in person. In support, three regiments of mounted slave troopers used their usual fire and maneuver drill, firing their muskets and galloping off to reload and then returning to repeat the attack. The enemy was now massed together and falling under the withering fire and cavalry charges. Meanwhile, Najib ud-Daulah and Shah Pesand Khan charged the Marathas’ flank with a decisive impact. The combat in the center lasted for one hour, during which both sides fought with spears, swords, battle-axes, and even daggers.



The Battle of Panipat, January 14, 1761.

Shortly after 2:00 PM, Viswasrao was killed by a musket ball, and the Marathas, who for religious reasons were fighting on empty stomachs, lost all hope and were on the verge of collapse. Half an hour later, Bhao, under whom three horses had been killed, fell while fighting. At around 3:00 PM, the fate of the battle became obvious when all at once the whole Maratha army turned their backs and fled at

full speed, leaving the field of battle covered with heaps of dead. As Kasi Raj relates, the moment the Marathas gave way the victors pursued them with the utmost fury, giving no quarter. Consequently the slaughter was “scarcely to be conceived” as the pursuit continued for 25 to 30 miles in every direction in which the wretched victims fled. Reportedly 500,000 men, women, and children of the Maratha camp were killed or taken prisoner.[128] This sounds greatly exaggerated but the number of Marathas killed in battle and during their escape was not less than 100,000. The hatred caused by the lengthy war was so deep that a large part of 40,000 prisoners were murdered by the Abdalis in cold blood. Among the senior Maratha commanders, Jankoji Sindhia and Ibrahim Khan Gardi were taken prisoner and executed at the Afghan camp.

The plunder taken from the Maratha camp was great. According to one contemporary author, Azad Bilgrami (1704–1786), who reported on the battle, in addition to millions of rupees and treasure of every kind, 50,000 horse, 200,000 oxen, many thousands of camels, and 500 elephants were captured.[129] One of the Afghan horsemen was said to have driven off 8 or 10 camels loaded with valuables. Captured horses were driven away in herds like cattle.

This battle, known as the Third Battle of Panipat, is widely considered one of the decisive battles of the world. The Afghans stopped the Marathas’ expansion and defeated the most formidable indigenous power on the subcontinent, which changed the history of India forever. This battle was so fatal to Maratha power that they immediately abandoned their designs on northern India, and it took them many years before they resumed their enterprise under a new leader and with new tactics. In spite of their partial recovery after a generation, they never regained any unity, as infighting broke out within the weakened empire, facilitating the conquest of India by the British some 50 years later. In military terms, the battle demonstrated the dominance of

light forces with strategic mobility and tactical agility over heavy and slow moving military fighting in traditional rank warfare tactics.

For Ahmad Shah, the battle became an epic since it was an exceptional military feat and accomplishment. His exploit raised the image of the Durrani Empire far beyond the borders of India and Persia. The Afghan military prowess inspired hope among many orthodox Muslims and Mughal royalists and caused fear among the British. However, it did not secure the eastern borders of the Durrani state, which was one of the main purposes of the campaign. The security threat to the Durrani dominions in Punjab was posed mainly by the Sikhs who lived there, while the Marathas' power center was 1,500 miles to the south. The destruction of the Maratha army left the Sikhs mostly untouched. The growing Sikhs' Dal Khalsa Army soon retook Lahore, forcing Ahmad Shah to launch three successive campaigns to quell the Sikh rebellions temporarily.

The Decline of the Empire

Ahmad Shah died in June 1773 at the age of 50 from a lingering serious illness. During his 26 years of rule he founded a vast empire that stretched from Delhi in the east to Nishapur in the west, from the Oxus River in the north to the Arabian Sea in the south. He was succeeded by his son Timur Shah, who faced a region undergoing political and military change. Domestically, he was faced with the difficult task of keeping the tribal chiefs happy and united without having them engaged in lucrative foreign conquests. Externally, he faced the challenge of holding the extended empire together and putting down rebellions. All his life, he struggled to assert his rule over the empire. In 1776, Timur Shah moved the capital from Kandahar to Kabul and used Peshawar as his winter capital. Kabul at that time was a

modest city in comparison to Kandahar. A British traveler, George Forster, who visited Kabul during Timur Shah's reign describes Kabul as a walled city of about a mile and a half in circumference where the houses, built of rough stones, clay, and unburned bricks, "exhibit a mean appearance and are ill suited to the grandeur which I expected to see in the capital of a great empire."[130] Although Timur Shah lacked the charisma of his father, he managed to maintain the integrity of the imperial dominions despite difficulty in certain cases.

Timur Shah left 36 children from ten mothers of different tribes. When he died in 1793, several of the princes were governors of provinces with personal followings and ambitions for the throne. A long period of power struggle ensued, with the Durrani throne changing hands four times in less than two decades. The long fraternal strife degenerated into dynastical shift as the powerful Barakzai house of Abdali challenged the authority of the last Durrani monarch, Shah Mahmud, and seized control of the country beginning in 1816. By 1826 the Barakzai prince Dost Mohammad became the acknowledged ruler of Kabul, Ghazni, and later Jalalabad,[131] while Kandahar remained in the hands of his half-brother Kohendil Khan and his full brothers. Herat was governed by Shah Mahmud and then his son until 1842, while Balkh, Kholm, Kunduz, and Badakhshan became independent petty states.

The long period of civil war and regime change split the army and polarized the tribes. The situation encouraged foreign states to chip away at the Durrani Empire's dominions. The rise of the Sikh state in Punjab to the east and the growth of the Persian power under the Qajar dynasty in the west strongly influenced the military history of Afghanistan at the turn of the nineteenth century. Motivated by the aspirations to found an independent state in Punjab, the Sikh military effort took a major turn at the end of the eighteenth century when the power of the Marathas was

weakened and divided and the Durrani Empire was inhibited by domestic power struggles and palace revolutions.

The British authorities in India, who were not directly involved in the affairs of Afghanistan until the closing years of the eighteenth century, became major actors in Afghan politics due to a number of factors that emerged over time. In the early years of the nineteenth century, the British extended the sphere of its influence in the northwest to the River Sutlej bordering the state of Sikhs in Punjab under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Early British meddling in Afghan affairs with significant strategic implications began in the closing years of the eighteenth century during the reign of Zaman Shah, the son of Timur Shah (1793–1801), who was inspired by calls from Indian Muslims, including the Mughal Emperor of Delhi and several Muslim Indian rulers, to help them against the Hindu Marathas. The Marathas were raiding Muslim principalities and Mughal dominions while the British were advancing west. Still in command of a large army and in support of unified tribes, Zaman Shah was about to invade northern India, following the example of his grandfather. As William Kaye wrote, “For many years Zaman Shah’s descent on Hindustan [northern India] kept the British Indian Empire in a chronic state of unrest.” This fear was somewhat exaggerated since Zaman Shah never advanced further than Lahore, and each time he moved toward Punjab, he was compelled to hurry back in order to deal with domestic troubles. What made the Afghan venture a formidable threat was that Zaman Shah could turn into “the willing agent of a hostile confederacy” and thus become a more serious opponent and a more successful one. Since the threat of a Napoleonic invasion of British India through Persia and Afghanistan was possible, an offensive alliance of France, Persia, and Afghanistan could become a real and imminent threat.

Alarmed by the threat, the British authorities took action to serve two objectives: first, winning an alliance with Persia

against a potential French invasion through Persian territory; and second, distracting the Durrani monarch from pursuing his Indian project. Securing the friendship of Persia was seen as the key to achieving both of these objectives. The British believed that if Afghanistan were threatened with an invasion from the west by the Persian army, Zaman Shah could never conduct a successful expedition against Hindustan. Further, as long as Persia remained true to Great Britain, there was nothing that French intrigues could accomplish in the countries of Central Asia. Persia's encouragement and the support of Zaman Shah's rival brother, Shah Mahmud, did distract Zaman Shah from moving into India on more than one occasion.

The threat to the British dominions in India temporarily disappeared with the fall of Zaman Shah and continued civil strife in Afghanistan. Soon, however, another threat from far beyond the subcontinent alarmed the British government regarding the security of their Indian possessions. Napoleon, who had failed to advance through Egypt, chose to make alliance with Persia for a land advance to India through Persia and Afghanistan. The invasion of India by Napoleon loomed large on the minds of English officials during this time, and the British decided to negotiate a defensive alliance with the Sikhs and the Afghans to serve as an outer line of defense to India. The Sikh maharaja Ranjit Singh and the Afghan Durrani monarch Shah Shuja signed defensive treaties with the British authorities in 1809. The treaty with Shah Shuja was an instrument used to form an alliance to defend Afghanistan against invasion by France and Russia.[132]

Briefly after the treaty of 1809, Shah Shuja was dethroned by Shah Mahmud, who had presided over the fall of the Sadozai dynasty in 1818, which led to the fragmentation of the Afghan state by civil war. For British India, both the Afghan threat and the fleeting menace of the French invasion of India had long disappeared. This was replaced by a long-

term threat of Russian expansion that influenced the political and military development in the region throughout the nineteenth century. This became known as the “Great Game” and is the topic of the next chapter.

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3 The Great Game and the British Invasion of Afghanistan

1809–1839

The military history of Afghanistan in the nineteenth century is entwined with the strategic competition and conflict between the British Empire and Tsarist Imperial Russia for supremacy in Central Asia, known as the Great Game.[1] The great powers' rivalry in the nineteenth century subsumed the Central Asian countries into the confrontation as they got caught up in the crossfire between the expanding Russia, on the one hand, and the counteracting Britain, on the other. Both powers were engaged in a heated race to surpass each other through winning political and military control over intermediate lands, including the Central Asian khanates, Afghanistan, and Persia. The competition was an inevitable spin-off of the two powers' imperial expansion over more than a century, moving from opposite directions and converging on Central Asia. In the middle of the eighteenth century, when Russia established its southern strategic base at Orenburg on the Ural River, the British East India Company was struggling to consolidate its shaky footing on the seaboard of southern and eastern India in the face of tough competition with the French colonialists and defiant indigenous powers. At that

time, the forward posts of the British and Russian Empires in Asia were separated by a distance of some 3,000 miles. About one century later, as the two empires overran more lands during their colonial expansion, that distance was reduced to about 850 miles—from the plains of Central Asia to the northwest frontier of India.

The immediate threat to the British possessions in India at the turn of the nineteenth century emanated from Napoleon's ambition to invade India over land routes. British diplomacy, which had succeeded in winning the security cooperation of Persia, Afghanistan, and the Sikhs' state of Punjab in 1809 against the threat of French invasion through Persia and Afghanistan, was soon overtaken by events. Napoleon's invasion of Russia and the destruction of his army in 1812 removed the French menace. But this menace was soon replaced by a more sustained and real threat from Russia, which was expanding south, first by using its influence in Persia and later though its domination of the Central Asian khanates, all the while eyeing the British possession in India.

The first Russo-Persian war concluded with the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813. The treaty confirmed the inclusion of today's Azerbaijan, Daghestan, and Georgia within the Russian Empire. The British saw this as a prelude to a Russian threat to "the jewel in the crown" of the British Empire. The treaty marked the beginning of the Great Game, which lasted close to a century before it practically ended in 1907 with the Anglo-Russian Convention, which defined the spheres of influence in Persia, confirmed Britain's influence in Afghanistan, and pledged mutual noninterference in Tibet.[2]

In the early nineteenth century, the developments in Persia, some 2,000 miles from the forward British posts in India, evidently seemed distant in space and time. But the subsequent advance of Russia south through the Caucasus and its undisputed command of the Caspian Sea alerted the

British Government to the impending Russian influence in Persia. Reacting to the situation, the British Government concluded a treaty with Persia in 1814, which was based on its agreement from 1809. Britain promised to aid the shah in case any European nation invaded Persia by either sending troops from India or paying an annual subsidy of 200,000 tomans. The second Russo-Persian war (1826–1828) ended with Persia's defeat and Russia's accession of Armenia and Nakhchivan according to the Treaty of Turkmenchay. During the war, the British Government failed to help the shah by sending troops or funds as stipulated in the treaty of 1814. Persia was obligated by the Russian-imposed treaty to pay a hefty indemnity amounting to three million pounds[3] and to allow Russian consulates anywhere within the country. Further, Russia exercised extraterritorial jurisdiction over Russian nationals (capitulation rights) in the Persian Qajarite Empire.[4] The British Government annulled its obligation under the treaty of 1814 by paying a sum of 200,000 tomans and left a weak and suppressed Persian government to the increasing influence of Russia.

The Playground

Arthur Conolly, the British intelligence officer, explorer, and writer (1807–1842) who coined the term "Great Game," believed that the invasion of India was not an immediate threat but it could take many years before the Russians became capable of invading India through one of the two routes—from a strategic base at Khiva across the Oxus River through Balkh, Kabul, and Peshawar, or from a base established on the Persian border through Herat along the main road across southern Afghanistan. He opined that "the mere distance that they [Russians] would have to march either way is less a matter for consideration than the natural facilities and difficulties of the countries through which the

route would lie, their political state, and the degree of assistance or otherwise that their inhabitants probably would or could render to invaders."[5]

With the rise of Russian political influence in Persia, the British viewed any Persian move to expand to western Khorasan and Herat as a spread of Russian influence to the west and, by extension, toward India. As early as January 1830, the governor general of India launched a new diplomatic initiative toward the independent states to the northwest. These included the Sikh's state of Punjab, the amirs of Sindh, and the Afghan principalities of Kabul and Kandahar. The aim of the diplomatic offensive was to keep the Russians at a distance from India by establishing friendly relations with these neighboring states and by making commercial penetrations into the Central Asian states of Khiva and Bukhara. The British attempted to open a more direct overland route to Central Asia through diplomacy. Up until then, the only route open to the northwest stretched from the "watergate" of Calcutta up the Ganges and overland across Punjab to Peshawar. The British sought a more direct route, beginning with sea access to Karachi and then moving up the Indus River either westward to Sukkur and overland to Kandahar through the Bolan Pass, or up the Indus River to Punjab and then overland to Kabul though Peshawar and the Khyber Pass.

Alexander Burnes explored the Indus River in 1831. He used the guise of taking a gift of horses from King William to Maharaja Ranjit Singh. This provided an opportunity to navigate and chart the river for future military operations. He also used the occasion to establish a working relationship with the amirs of Sindh. The khan of Bahawalpur maintained cordial ties with the British authorities. In Punjab, the mighty Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh presided over a strong polity with a highly trained and well-equipped army of up to 40,000 men and a large artillery park. The British saw the relationship with the state of Punjab as an instrument for securing the

British frontier in the northwest.[6] In Afghanistan, Amir Dost Mohammad Khan was the strongest leader within the fragmented power structure in the country. He had strengthened his political standing after defeating Shah Shuja's attempts to regain his throne in 1834 in Kandahar.[7]

These regional states, however, had issues with one another that kept them in constant conflict. Amir Dost Mohammad Khan never stopped his efforts to regain control of Peshawar. Peshawar was captured by the Sikhs during the amir's absence in 1834, when he marched to Kandahar to repel Shah Shuja's attack. The Sindh rulers were at odds with Maharaja Ranjit Singh over his encroachment on the amirs' territories in Shikarpur. Finally, Afghanistan still claimed sovereignty over Sindh in spite of the loss of Kabul's practical control over the province.

While the British government favored the rise of the Sikhs' power in Punjab (with its large army of regular troops trained and equipped after the European models), it did not want the Sikhs' polity to overgrow its usefulness as a buffer state against foreign invasions and become a threat. To the dismay of the amir of Kabul, the British government agreed to the annexation of Peshawar by the Sikhs in 1834 but, in 1836, warned the maharaja against expanding down the Indus to take control of Shikarpur and Upper Sindh. These were ceded to him by Shah Shuja in return for supporting the Afghan prince's attempt to regain the Afghan throne in 1833–1834. Subsequent negotiations convinced the Sikhs' ruler to leave Sindh outside his sphere of influence.

British mediation became instrumental in cementing friendly relations between the British Government and the amirs of Sindh, which contributed to an alliance that turned Sindh into another friendly British buffer state against external invaders. British diplomacy succeeded in both Punjab and Sindh since it satisfied each with certain political dispensations, that is, the annexation of Peshawar by the

Sikhs and the retention of Shikarpur by the Sindhis. But the policy left one major party displeased and defiant. Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul continued to attempt to regain Peshawar, which had been lost to the Sikhs as a result of Shah Shuja's and Ranjit Singh's intrigues with the tacit approval of the British.

The Afghans passionate attachment to Peshawar and their desire to free it from the Sikhs' control influenced all forms of diplomatic contact with the British government. The Afghans considered the city a major hub of what is known as *Lara Pashtunkhwa*, or "lower Pashtun country," and the traditional winter capital of Afghan dynasties since the middle of the eighteenth century. Further, the Sikhs failed to establish firm control over Peshawar and many other areas west of the Indus River. The Sikhs administered the area mostly through local surrogates and tributaries.[8] Since the fall of Peshawar to the Sikhs in 1834, Amir Dost Mohammad had spared no effort to regain the province. In order to mobilize the Afghans to save Peshawar, he declared *Jihad* against the Sikhs and assumed the title of Amir-ul-Momenin (the commander of the faithful) in order to legitimize his call for a holy war. Thousands of people responded to the call, and the amir led an army of some 10,000 devoted mounted fighters to drive the Sikhs out of Peshawar. The move alarmed Ranjit Singh, who decided not to take the field against the excited *ghazis*. Instead, he sent mediators, including the American adventurer Josiah Harlan, to settle the issue peacefully with the amir. Meanwhile the Sikh leader succeeded in bribing the amir's ever-hostile brothers, and their dissension caused the Kabul army to melt away. The amir returned broken-hearted to Kabul.

Toward the end of 1836, the Sikh general Hari Singh attacked and captured the small but strategic village of Jamrud, at the southern mouth of the Khyber Pass. This pushed the border of the Sikh Empire to the frontiers of Kabul. The provocation brought the Afghan army back into

the field facing Jamrud. On April 30, 1837, the Afghan forces under Sardar Akbar Khan, Amir Dost Mohammad Khan's son, defeated the Sikh army and killed the Sikh general, Hari Singh. With the arrival of Sikh reinforcements, however, the Afghan army was unable to advance on Peshawar and had to return. As a result of the battle, the Sikh influence was constrained at the Jamrud-Khyber line, while the loss of Hari Singh dealt a major blow to the Sikhs. Two years later, Ranjit Singh died, and the Sikh state plunged into dynastic conflict, and it eventually fell to the British in 1849. The dynasty had lasted 50 years (1799–1849).

The Russo-Persian Threat

In the 1830s, Persian plans to expand eastward into Khorasan down to Herat with Russian support soon outgrew their local dimensions and became a regional and international threat. The plans were overplayed by the British observers, who saw them as a Russian-instigated design against British interests in the region and a threat to its possessions in India. There is no doubt that Russia did influence the shah's decision to invade Khorasan and move on Herat, and Russia also considered the expansion in line with Moscow's geopolitical interests. The expansion, however, was basically driven by the ambitions of the Persian rulers, who never missed an opportunity to establish control over western Khorasan and Herat. The situation in Afghanistan, after the disintegration of the Durrani Empire and the fragmentation of the Afghan state, tempted the Persian court to seize an opportunity and compensate its loss of territory to the Russians in the west by making gains in the east. The situation was particularly inviting since competing Afghan principalities sought alliances with Persia in order to threaten their rivals.

In the autumn of 1834, the Qajar king Fateh Ali Shah (reigned 1797–1834) died, and his grandson Mohammad Mirza ascended the throne as Mohammad Shah Qajar. The succession did not portend well for the British since the new shah, like his father, embraced the "Russkies" as close allies, allowing the Russians to exert inordinate influence over the Persian court. One of the cherished projects of the young shah was toppling the Afghan Sadozai monarchy in Herat and annexing the province. The Russian agents missed no opportunity to reinforce the passion of the shah's ambition. The shah "profoundly reverenced the gigantic power of the Czar, and, mistaking quiescence for weakness, aggressiveness for strength, contrasted the resources of Russia and England in a manner very unfavorable to the pretensions of the latter."[9]

In 1835 the British foreign secretary Lord Palmerstone (in office 1830–1841) warned the shah through his envoy, Sir Henry Ellis, against allowing himself to be pushed into making war against the Afghans. The warning, however, made little difference. Ellis wrote back that the shah had "very extended schemes of conquest in the direction of Afghanistan. . . . In common . . . the Persian monarch strongly claimed the right of sovereignty over Herat and Kandahar and his pretension is much sustained by the success of his father Abbas Mirza, in the Khorasan campaign, and the suggestions of General Berowski [*sic*]."[10] The envoy suggested countermoves on the part of the British government to keep the combined Russo-Persian intrigues in check. One of the measures he suggested was sending an envoy to Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul to train the amir's army.

While some Russian imperialists considered Russian encouragement and even support of the Persian court in its eastward expansion as an opportunity not to miss, it could hardly become part of a serious game plan of the Russian government at that time. It was a strategic probe that was

hardly decisive and was a step forward that could be pushed further or conveniently withdrawn. As Ferrier wrote: “The idea of laying siege to Herat for the purpose of effectually putting a stop to the incursions of the Heratis on the Persian territory, and forcing Kamran to pay tribute, originated with Mohamed Shah.”[11] British policy makers and some of their advisors blew the picture of the threat out of all proportions.

The participation of the Russian military in the Persian invasion of Herat has also been subject to exaggeration by British policy analysts. No doubt the Russian government was supporting the project with money, arms, and certain military advisors, but some of the officers identified as Russian military officers had no direct connection with the Russian army. One Brigadier (Sartip) Samson Khan, of Russian origin and a deserter, had resided in Persia for many years and was more of a Persian than a Russian. According to Russian officers engaged in the siege, the shah’s army numbered 40,000 troops with sixty guns. The army included a Russian battalion comprising Russian immigrants settled in Persia.[12]

The British felt that the Persian court’s determination to invade Afghanistan with Russian assistance was so adamant that using only diplomatic measures to prevent the invasion would prove inadequate. The Afghan rulers in Herat, however, were not terrified of the impending Persian invasion. They stood firm and defiant against the Persian threats. Tehran’s overtures to Herati rulers to negotiate their surrender were countered with a brave and spirited response. The obdurate Vizier Yar Mohammad Khan taunted the Persian king by calling for a showdown if he wished and promised that the Persians would face strong resistance. Yar Mohammad’s harsh response delayed the Herat campaign until the spring of 1836. This lengthy delay reflected the Persian’s hope that the matters would be settled through negotiation. At stake was the independence of Herat, which was threatened by rival Afghan rulers as well as the Persian

army assisted by Russian troops. Shah Kamran, the last Sadozai king in Herat, could not be persuaded to become a mere vassal of Tehran.

The Afghan Political Context

Thus, at a critical time when Afghanistan faced increasing pressure from two rival powers, the Afghan princes failed to take a unified stand to deal with the looming threats that affected all of them. Instead, they deceitfully chose to make separate deals with foreign powers, often at the expense of one another. Their internal feud was exploited by the outsiders to advance their interests by pitting one prince against the other. In the east, the habitual hostility between Amir Dost Mohammad of Kabul and his brother Sultan Mohammad in Peshawar facilitated the Sikhs' inroads into Afghan territory. The Peshawar Sardar Sultan Mohammad plotted more than once with the Sikhs to undermine the power of his brother in Kabul. He preferred to be a vassal of Lahore than a dependent of the chief of Kabul. In Kandahar, the Kohendil khan and his full brothers welcomed the amir's help against the attack of Shah Shuja but not his overlordship. In the west, the holdout Sadozai king Kamran, the great grandson of Ahmad Shah Durrani, remained an archenemy of the Barakzai rulers.

The Afghan political context shaped and influenced the strategy of the competing neighboring powers. The British rulers in India viewed Herat as an outer defense line of the British Empire that must be defended politically and even militarily. A Russo-Persian invasion of Herat threatened the British rule in India. Kabul's and Kandahar's friendly overtures to the Persian king were prospective obstacles to British interests. Therefore Kabul and Kandahar were to be forced into an alliance with the British or replaced by more subservient princes. But as noted earlier, the British were

reluctant to pay the minimum political price for an alliance with the amir of Kabul, since his demands conflicted with the interests of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, whom the British considered their staunch and powerful ally on the borders of the British Indian Empire and a buffer against an invasion from the west.

It was under these circumstances that the British government dispatched the Alexander Burnes mission to Kabul to open discussions with Amir Dost Mohammad Khan. In the spring of 1836, the amir addressed a letter to Lord Auckland congratulating him on his assumption of the office of governor-general. In the note he complained about the Sikhs' aggression against Afghan territories and asked Auckland's intervention to settle the dispute. The amir suggested that the Indus River should constitute the boundary between the two states and offered in return to renounce his authority over Kashmir in favor of the Sikhs. The response from Lord Auckland was not encouraging to the amir of Kabul. He wrote, "I have learned with deep regret that dissentions exist between yourself and Maharaja Ranjit Singh. My friend, you are aware that it is not the practice of the British Government to interfere with the affairs of other independent states; and indeed it does not immediately occur to me how the interference of my Government could be exercised for your benefit." The assertion proved to be a most hollow statement when three years later Lord Auckland violated the "practice" he claimed to be the basis of his government's policy and ordered the ouster of the amir. In fact, the policy of the British government was influenced by a number of powerful officers whose judgments of local rulers and political developments linked to the defense of India were far from being unbiased. Among them was Claude Wade, the governor general's political agent for Punjab and the North West Frontier (in office 1823–1840), who regarded the Sikh state not only as a valuable ally but also as an outer line of defense against Russian invasion. In his letter to Amir

Dost Mohammad, the governor general informed him that he was sending an envoy to discuss a bilateral commercial relationship. The mission was headed by Captain Alexander Burnes (later Sir Alexander Burnes), a distinguished officer who had visited Kabul four years earlier during his exploratory travels to Bukhara and had established friendly terms with the nobles in Kabul. His delegation was nominally a commercial mission, but in fact it was one of political exploration without definitive guidance. Burnes arrived in Kabul on September 20, 1837, to a warm and splendid reception by the amir of Kabul and his vizier and brother, Nawab Abdul Jabar Khan. The failure of the mission was obvious from the outset as the British agent had no authority to make political decisions and asked for everything and promised nothing.

Right from the beginning, the amir and his ministers made it clear to the British mission that Peshawar was the critical issue in any negotiation. The Afghan side demanded a British commitment to protect Kabul and Kandahar against Persian invasion and to help in the transfer of Peshawar from Ranjit Singh to the amir. During Burnes's seven-month stay in the Afghan capital (September 1837–April 1838) Amir Dost Mohammad Khan made every effort possible to win the trust of the governor general and offered his firm support for British security policy by rejecting an alliance with Persia and even advised his brothers in Kandahar to refrain from a security alliance with the Persian government and the Russian agents. He sought British assistance in his plans and, in return for his recognition by the British government as the amir of Kabul and with the payment of a subsidy, he offered to send an army to the rescue of Herat, despite his feud with Shah Kamran, and to remain the most loyal and devoted ally of the British.

Meanwhile, Burnes's offer of support to the Kandahar chiefs in order to dissuade them from an alliance with Persia was censured by the British authorities, as it included an

unauthorized pledge of 300,000 rupees. Mohan Lal (1812–1877), Amir Dost Mohammad Khan's biographer, recorded that the amir was in correspondence with the shah and the Russian tsar, seeking their assistance against the Sikhs.[13] These letters, however, according to Sykes, represented the customary policy of the rulers of Persia, Bukhara, and Afghanistan, which might be termed a policy of "feelers" rather than a serious engagement.[14]

During this period, however, three major developments cast a long shadow over the diplomatic contacts between the British government and the Afghan rulers, leading to the British military intervention in support of regime change in Afghanistan:

- the invasion of Herat by Persia with Russian support;
- the Russian diplomatic schemes to pull Kabul into the Russo-Persian camp;
- British policy change in support of the regime change in Afghanistan.

The Siege of Herat

In late summer 1837, Muhammad Shah Qajar of Persia moved his army, supported by Russian troops and "volunteers" and mentored by tsarist officers, against Herat in defiance of persistent opposition from the British minister in Tehran against the invasion.

In anticipation of the invasion, the ruler of Herat, Shah Kamran, and his all-pervading vizier, Yar Mohammad Khan, ordered that all the crops, grain, and forage from the surrounding districts should be brought into the city, that the surplus should be destroyed, and that the fruit trees should be cut down in the surrounding gardens. This deliberate devastation was aimed at depriving the enemy of local supplies during a lengthy siege. Following the fall of Ghurian

on November 15, 1837, the 30,000-strong Persian army marched in three columns on Herat.

This initial battle before the walls of Herat epitomized the encounter between the opposing forces, which lasted over ten months. The Persian operation was poorly managed due to its lack of desirable cohesiveness and the inconsistent coordination among the commanders and their Russian supporters. The resistance of the Herati defenders was effective and sustained not only because of their strong will to defend their homes but also due to the poor performance of the enemy troops, which the Heratis characterized as “a set of the most contemptible cowards, because they marched in compact bodies, defended by their guns, instead of straggling boldly about on purpose to be cut off by marauding Afghans.”[15] On November 23, the Persians actually began the siege, which soon developed into a full-scale operation with daily bombardments of the city defenses by the Persian siege artillery and nightly sallies by Herati horse on enemy lines surrounding the city. In response to a call by Kamran for help against the Persians, an army of Hazara and Uzbeks from Maimana, Sheberghan, and Sar-i Pul rushed to Herat and attacked the besiegers.[16] In order to inspire the Sunni population of the city into fighting the Persian invaders, who were of the Shi’a sect, the Herati leaders and the mullahs did not spare any opportunity to provoke religious schism by accusing the Persian Shi’as of being hostile to the Sunni believers of Herat. Among them, Mullah Abdul Haq, a leading cleric, declared *Jihad* against the “blasphemous” Shi’as, who had allied themselves with the faithless Russians in attacking a Muslim country.[17] Over time, this religious schism contributed to the fierceness of struggle.

The lengthy siege of Herat featured a number of military and diplomatic facets:

- the besieger investment of the city was loose and imperfect;
- the besieged conducted an active, aggressive defense;
- diplomatic activities continued onsite throughout the siege;
- the Persians conducted a single general assault on the city after seven months, which ended in devastating failure;
- and finally, a British diversionary action in the Persian Gulf expedited the shah's decision to raise the siege and retreat.

The combat actions throughout the long months of the siege caused little change in the military situation and produced no significant gains for either party. The siege was not tight enough to restrict movement in and out of the city. Three of the five gates of the city were kept open, and communications with the surrounding country were preserved. The cattle were sent out to graze. Fire wood and other commodities were brought into the city. The vaunted prowess of the Persian army and the Cossacks' resourcefulness failed to live up to public expectations, making the defenders bolder and boosting their morale. Every night the garrison sallied out, attacked the enemy, gathered booty, often destroyed enemy entrenchments, wounded or killed enemy troops, and "carried their bleeding heads, with barbarous triumph, into the city. Whilst the activity of the garrison seemed rather to increase, that of the besiegers was plainly declining."[18]

In 1837, Lieutenant Eldred Pottinger, a British traveler and adventurer serving as a secret agent to his government, with a background in military and political service with the British army, disguised himself and made a journey through central Afghanistan to Herat. He was now staying in Herat. He contacted the Afghan rulers of Herat, identified himself, and

offered his services. The Vizier Yar Mohammad Khan, as well as Shah Kamran, took him in graciously and listened to the counsel of this seemingly unassuming traveler concerning the defense of Herat. Through this, Pottinger became a name associated with the successful defense of Herat against the Persian invasion, though his role was later described with a great deal of exaggeration. His standing with the Herati rulers was raised to the extent that in February 1838 the vizier dispatched him as an envoy representing the Afghans to the Persian camp. He was received courteously by Mohammad Shah, who declared that he would not end the siege until the city fell to his forces.

In April 1838, Sir John McNeil, the British minister in Tehran, reached the shah's camp to mediate peace between the Persians and the Afghans. He visited the city of Herat, and after discussing matters with Kamran and the vizier he returned to the Persian camp. However, with the arrival of the Russian ambassador, Count Simonich, to the camp, the shah went back on his promises to give peace a chance and abruptly refused British intervention. Meanwhile, the Russian envoy distributed money freely among the soldiers, and his officers instructed the Persians on how to emplace more effective batteries. In the meantime, the British minister was mistreated by the Persian ministers. This prompted him to break off relations and leave the Persian camp in June.

The highlight of the long siege of Herat was the general assault on Herat on June 24, 1838. The storming operation was organized by the Russian general Borowski and involved the entire Persian force. The assault opened with a heavy barrage from the Persian batteries, which were located on all four sides of the city. Then after a perfect lull, a calm before the storm, the Persians launched a general assault on the city walls at five different points. At four of these points, the attackers were repulsed, while at the fifth, the storming parties, headed by their officers, daringly mounted the walls and pressed on in the face of tough resistance. It was at this

point that the British “volunteer” Eldred Pottinger showed heroic leadership and gallantry while prodding the dispirited defenders and their leader, Yar Mohammad, into the fray. The defenders succeeded in driving back the attackers and pushing them off the walls with concentrated blows. The Afghans repulsed the Persians’ assault, Herat was saved, and the Persians were badly beaten. Russian general Borowski, who led the Russian contingent, was killed in action, while Samson, who commanded a regiment of Russian deserters, was wounded. The failure of the assault stunned and strongly demoralized the Persian camp, where all combat activities died down for a week while the garrison began repairing the damaged fortifications.

This assault was the last hurrah of Mohammad Shah in his attempt to reduce Herat. His army never recovered from the shock of the failure. As the shah was contemplating lifting the siege, a British move in the Persian Gulf expedited the Persian decision to leave Herat. During the last months of the siege, the British *Semiramis* and *Hugh Lindsay* steamers and some other combat vessels steamed out of Bombay Harbor on June 4 and on June 19 anchored off the Kharg Island and landed detachments of three regiments onto the isle. On August 11, Colonel Stoddert reached the Persian camp with instructions to inform the shah of the decisions of the British government. The shah, who was utterly depressed by the failure of the general assault on Herat and was much alarmed by rumors that the British not only had seized Kharg but had invaded Fars, consented to the “whole of the demand of the British Government,” and on September 9, 1838, he mounted his horse and the failed Persian army retired from Herat.

The Russians Are Coming!

As Burnes was engaged in tough negotiations with the amir and his ministers, Russian captain Vitkovich arrived in Kabul on December 19, 1837, carrying letters from Count Simonich, the Russian minister in Tehran, and correspondence from the Persian king Mohammad Shah and the emperor of Russia. The Russian “commercial agent,” Vitkovich, who had served on the governor’s staff at Orenburg, had joined the Persian army on its march on Herat. He traveled to Kandahar and concluded an agreement with its chiefs, who owing to their hostility toward Shah Kamran of Herat were ready to collaborate with Mohammad Shah against Herat. From there the Russian agent proceeded to Kabul. As Dost Mohammad Khan hoped to make a deal with the British, he was reluctant to become seriously engaged with the Russian envoy and the envoy was received coldly. But at the end of January 1838, Burnes received his instruction from the governor general, which had dashed Dost Mohammad’s hope for British mediation between him and the maharaja. Burnes informed the amir that he should waive his own claims to Peshawar and be content with such arrangements as Ranjit Singh might be inclined to enter into with Sultan Mohammad.

The final message on February 21 from Calcutta was even more discouraging, as it stated in the most decisive language that there was no intention to accede to the proposals of the amir, and that Peshawar must be left to the Sikhs. Even more astonishing to the Afghan chief was Lord Auckland’s call on him to “abstain from connecting himself with every other state; and promised, as the price of this isolation, that they would restrain Ranjit Singh from attacking his dominions.” This was the straw that broke the camel’s back. Obviously Burnes had no authority to accede to any of the amir’s propositions, and he saw no hope of a satisfactory adjustment. This practically ended the Burnes mission, and British diplomacy in Kabul failed in spite of the flexibility and

reasonable attitude showed by the amir of Kabul. This British failure opened the way to the Russian mission.

As Burnes was preparing to wrap up his mission in Kabul, Sardar Mehrdil Khan of Kandahar arrived in Kabul with the aim of winning over the amir to the Persian alliance. The Russians, according to Alexander Burnes, gave the British the coup de grâce. Burnes left Kabul on April 26, 1838, while the Russian envoy rose greatly in favor. After promising everything that Dost Mohammad wanted, Vitkovich left for Herat accompanied by Sardar Mehrdil Khan and one of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan's representatives. The Russian promises proved to be illusive, while the British denial of partnership with Kabul cost the latter much more than it politically damaged the amir and his kingdom.

The Change in British Policy

During the time Burnes was involved in his negotiations in Afghanistan, the policy of the British government gradually changed and shifted toward regime change in Afghanistan. The governor general and the policy makers in England were swayed by the alarming news emanating from the Russo-Persian siege of Herat and by the reports of Persian and Russian emissaries at work in Afghanistan. These policy makers were ignorant of the truth on the ground at Herat and of any resultant threat to the British frontier on the Sutlej River some 1,200 miles away.

One of the most influential factors in the British policy shift was the pro–Shah Shuja and pro-Sikh lobbies within the British policy-making circles. All correspondence from the field, sent by Alexander Burnes, passed through the hands of the pro-Sikh and pro-Shuja lobbyist Claude Wade. The latter reportedly often omitted selected passages from Burnes's correspondence where his arguments in support of working with Dost Mohammad Khan were fairly convincing and the

amir's strong commitment to ally himself with the British was very obvious and certain. Years later, such falsification of diplomatic documents, including Burnes's dispatches from Kabul that led to the formation of a failed policy, was strongly debated at the British Parliament.[19] In early 1838, while Herat was under the Persian siege, Wade suggested that in view of Dost Mohammad's unreasonable continued demand to regain Peshawar, British interests might be better served by supporting the restoration of Shah Shuja, who was well disposed toward his British paymasters. Further, he claimed, since Shah Shuja himself had ceded Peshawar to the Sikhs, he would hardly make the return of the province a condition of friendship with the British.

It was in this context that Auckland took a harsher line against the amir of Kabul, telling him that unless he accepted Ranjit Singh as the ruler of Peshawar and unless he agreed to have no relations with foreign powers except by British approval British good will would come to an end. Lord Auckland's decision was strongly influenced by a dispatch in 1836 from the Secret Committee of the Court of Directors,[20] headed by Sir John Hobhouse, instructing the governor general to adopt any interference necessary in the affairs of Afghanistan "either to prevent the extension of the Persian domination in that quarter, or to raise a timely barrier against the impending encroachment of Russian influence." Lord Auckland's views as stated in a letter to the influential Secret Committee indicated doubts about the position of Amir Dost Mohammad, who he claimed courted Persia, Russia, and the British in his pressing need. But he opined that "it would be madness in us, though we may wish his independence assured, to quarrel with the Sikhs for him."

Auckland needed Ranjit Singh's friendship more than that of the Afghans. Once the policy of putting Shah Shuja on the Kabul throne was made, partnership with the maharaja was a key element of the project. The decision to conduct regime change in Kabul, replacing Amir Dost Mohammad and the

chiefs of Kandahar with the ex-king Shah Shuja, was made in the spring of 1838 while the Burnes mission was failing and the Russian agents were at work in Kabul and Kandahar. The British government decided that the best policy would be to place on the throne of Kabul an Afghan prince who would be well disposed toward Lahore and the British. Only Shah Shuja was considered as a match to these requirements. The ground realities, however, were different, as a British veteran of the war, Vincent Eyre (later Major General Sir Vincent Eyre), wrote: “The obvious policy of the British Government at that period was to conciliate the goodwill of the Afghan nation (of whom Dost Muhammad was the acknowledged and popular de facto ruler), as the most effective barrier we could raise against present and future invasions of western powers. But it was not so to be! Lord Auckland and his official advisers had, from the very first, conceived an inveterate distrust of Dost Muhammad for the difficulties of whose position they failed to make due allowance, and whose many sterling qualities as a ruler they equally failed to understand and appreciate.”[21]

The political framework for the war was provided by a tripartite treaty between Shah Shuja, Ranjit Singh, and the British government. The treaty, signed on June 26, 1838, in Lahore, was inked by the three parties, with Lord Auckland, the governor general of India, representing the British government. The signatories agreed that the friends and enemies of each of the contracting parties were the friends and enemies of all. The treaty confirmed Ranjit Singh’s possession of Peshawar and all the districts he held west of the Indus River in exchange for his stationing a force of 5,000 troops in Peshawar under a Muslim general, which would assist Shah Shuja if required. The cost of this force was to be paid for by the British on behalf of Shah Shuja to the tune of 200,000 rupees annually. Further, Shah Shuja accepted the British control of his foreign policy and agreed not to attack his nephew Shah Kamran in Herat. He also

gave up his claim to sovereignty over Sindh in return for a one-time cash compensation, the amount of which was to be fixed by the British government. Meanwhile, Ranjit Singh dropped his claim to Shikarpur, which was intended to be settled by British mediation.[22]

The Plan for the Regime Change

There were two strategic objectives set for the British military campaign. The first was to force the Persians to raise the siege of Herat or to recapture the city in case it fell before the British forces reached there. The second objective was to secure Afghanistan against future threats to India by installing a pro-British ruler, Shah Shuja, on the Afghan throne. The former goal was the more pressing one as it dealt with an actual threat and needed to be addressed immediately. The long distance between Herat and India required urgent measures to support the Herati defenders before they were overwhelmed by the besiegers.

The campaign plan was based more on political feasibility than on purely military considerations. It was built upon the treaty of 1834 between Ranjit Singh and Shah Shuja in support of the latter's project to invade Kandahar. The initial concept was to launch the campaign along two axes, with Shah Shuja leading an army on the southern axis to Kandahar through Sindh and the Bolan Pass and another column comprising Ranjit Singh's troops moving on the northern axis to Kabul through Peshawar and the Khyber Pass. However, the plan was altered when Alexander Burnes and other British officers familiar with Afghan politics raised the issue that a campaign led by Shah Shuja, who failed in his previous attempts, might not inspire collaboration with the Afghan tribal leaders. Further, without the significant participation of the British military in the campaign, they argued, the Afghans would see the project as a Sikh-

dominated invasion using Shah Shuja as a stooge of the "hated" Sikhs, to whom the Afghan prince had already ceded Peshawar. Further, Ranjit Singh was unwilling to make a great show of force, fearing the ferocity of the Afghan fighters in the Khyber Pass and in the mountains beyond. Thus the commitment of British forces was seen to have been more than a token gesture.

Meanwhile Shah Shuja proved unable to raise sufficient disciplined forces within a reasonable time. Thus less than a month after the signing of the Tripartite Treaty, Lord Auckland concluded that a British force must be sent to Kabul to set Shah Shuja on the throne. This made the British army the main actor in the drama, with contingents of Shah Shuja's and those of the Sikhs being merely supporting elements. The size of the expeditionary force was large enough to allow the dispatch of at least a division-sized formation (about 5,000 combat troops) to Herat after the seizure of Kandahar.

About two months later, after the Persians raised the siege of Herat (on September 9) and the Russo-Persian menace faded, the change in the situation did not alter Auckland's plan. It would make sense to have canceled the military expedition and reached out to Dost Muhammad for a less-costly security deal. But he had ordered the expeditionary forces to assemble—*Caesar had crossed the Rubicon*. William Macnaghten was appointed to the important post of "Envoy and Minister of the Government of India at the Court of Shah Shuja-ul-Mulk," with Alexander Burnes as an independent political officer assigned to cooperate with Macnaghten.

There were three possible operational axes of advance to Afghanistan with varying topographic and operational characteristics. The northwestern direction of Attock, Peshawar, and Kabul was the shortest route to the Afghan capital. A due western road through Dera Ismael Khan across the Gomel Pass to Muqur, southwest of Ghazni, was the shortest path to the heart of Afghanistan (it led to a point

nearly equidistant to Kabul and Kandahar). The third was a circuitous route through Sindh, Shikarpur, the Bolan Pass, and Quetta on to Kandahar. The first axis was politically unsuitable, as the Sikh ruler was opposed to the passage of a large army through his territory. The second route, a historical invasion route, was marred by topographic and climatic disadvantages since the country was mountainous with poor roads mostly blocked by snow during the season in which the army intended to advance. The third route, though circuitous and demanding more abundant transportation means, provisions, and troops to maintain the line of communications within a turbulent country, was selected for the advance of the army of the Indus for a number of political and military reasons. First, since the plan was adopted before the retreat of the Persians from Herat, the main objective of the campaign was the early relief of Herat or the recapture of it; and the southern route was the quickest direction by which to facilitate the attainment of the objective. Second, even after it was known that the Persians had raised the siege and retired from Herat, an advance on the southern axis was seen as helpful in establishing a foothold in Sindh by securing a nominally temporary hold on the key points, including the Bukkur fort and Shikarpur. Further, the army's presence was able to force the amirs of Sindh to contribute some 300,000 rupees to the expedition, payable to Ranjit Singh and Shah Shuja.

The Simla Manifesto

The decision to invade Afghanistan on Shah Shuja's behalf was made public in the Simla Manifesto, issued by Lord Auckland on October 1, 1838, in which the British case against Dost Mohammad Khan was clearly set out. Lord Auckland denounced Amir Dost Mohammad, whose action against the Sikhs' aggression at the mouth of the Khyber

Pass was termed “a sudden and unprovoked attack upon the troops of our ancient ally Ranjit Singh.” Further in the document he stated that

> it was now evident that no further interference could be exercised by the British Government to bring about a good understanding between the Sikh ruler and Dost Mohammad Khan, and the hostile policy of the latter chief showed too plainly that so long that Kabul remained under his government, we could never hope that the tranquility of our neighborhood would be secured, or that the interests of our Indian Empire would be preserved inviolate.

This was not a strong argument in support of regime change in Kabul that would replace the amir with a person who had repeatedly failed to be placed “on his throne by his own subjects and adherents,” as Auckland hoped would happen this time. Simply put, Dost Mohammad was seen as the enemy of Ranjit Singh, Britain’s ally. The amir was suspected of becoming an ally of Muhammad Shah of Persia, who by attacking Herat had become Britain’s enemy. The British were thus driven to support Dost Mohammad’s enemy, Shah Shuja, who “will enter Afghanistan surrounded by his own troops and will be supported against foreign interference and factious opposition by a British army.” The manifesto expected that the British army would be withdrawn as soon as Shah Shuja was firmly established, and British influence would be used to try to settle the feuds that had disturbed the peace and prosperity of Afghanistan for the past years.[23]

Such justification of a blatant invasion became the subject of harsh criticism by more sober British thinkers. The British author Henry George Keene (1825–1915) noted that personally Shah Shuja’s claims were weak as

> he had been driven out of Afghanistan when young; he was sixty, stamped with the brand of failure and particularly unpopular on account of his haughty manners. The Dost [Mohammad], on the other hand, could point to many years of successful rule, though only as Amir, without exercise or claim of absolute sovereignty. The only parallel to Auckland’s policy was Louis XIV enduring to expel William of Orange to make room for James Stuart. Yet of this policy a Liberal English Cabinet approved warmly.[24]

In the words of Sir Henry Durand: “In order to repel the shadow of Russian aggression, we had resolved to force Shah Shuja, a weakened worthless exile, upon the Afghan people, till then well disposed towards us; and this great and unprovoked injustice, the cause of all our subsequent troubles in Afghanistan, was to be effected by military measures of which the rashness and folly seem at the present day almost inconceivable.”[25]

The Army of the Indus

The forces of invasion, known as the Army of the Indus, included the expeditionary force that marched into Afghanistan, the strategic reserves concentrated in Firozpur, Sindh, and Peshawar, and the elements protecting the line of communication. It comprised the British army formations from the Bengal and Bombay armies, the Shah Shuja contingents,[26] and the combined Sikh and Prince Timur troops. The Army of the Indus numbered over 55,000 combat troops plus tens of thousands of service details and camp followers. The largest component was the British army, made up of two divisions from the Bengal army, one division from the Bombay army and a host of attached combat support and service units. The elements from the Bengal army included three European and two Native cavalry regiments and two European and seven Native infantry regiments. The army of Bombay brought one European and two Native cavalry regiments and two European and four Native infantry regiments.[27]

But before the expeditionary forces began their long march from different locations to concentrate in Sindh for the invasion, Lord Auckland received an official notification of the retreat of the Persians from Herat. The governor-general, however, continued the invasion plan to achieve his second objective of controlling Afghanistan through pro-British

proxies. The retreat of the Persians from Herat stripped the project of its only pretended justification and turned it into a flagrant, single-goaled invasion of an “independent state” to replace the legitimate ruler of Afghanistan with a puppet king subservient to the British regional interests. The only change made in the plan was to reduce the size of the expeditionary forces by one infantry division of the Bengal army, which was ordered to stay at Firozpur in strategic reserve. Sir Henry Fane, the commander in chief of the Indian armies, relinquished command of the expedition to Sir John Keane, the commander of the Bombay army. The adjustments were announced on November 30, notifying that under the changed situation the command of the Bengal army component was to be assumed by Major General Sir Willoughby Cotton.

The concentration of the army was fully accomplished by the end of November 1838 at the frontier station of Firozpur, about 450 miles from Sukkur in Sindh, where the army intended to cross the Indus. From Sukkur there were another 400 miles to Kandahar, located to the northwest, and from that city to Kabul was 325 miles.

The Afghan Army

The long period of civil war and the fragmentation of the Afghan Empire during the first quarter of the nineteenth century reduced the army into opportunistic splinters serving rival contenders to power. The breakup of the military machine not only shrunk the size of the army but also deteriorated its professional ability and operational effectiveness. The civil war was fought mostly by paid armies, which often melted away when funds and other resources dwindled. As the state and separate principalities lost their financial resources, they could hardly afford to maintain large armies and keep the state on a war footing

for long. Under Amir Dost Mohammad Khan, the kingdom of Kabul was not short on fighting men but lacked sufficient revenue to maintain a large force. The total revenue of the provinces under Amir Dost Mohammad Khan's control, as reported by his ministers, amounted to a little over 2.5 million rupees—an equivalent at the time of less than a quarter million pounds (£226,294).[28] The amir's adamant position on regaining Peshawar from the Sikhs was partly linked to the significant revenue that the province would bring to the amir's coffers.

The size of Dost Mohammad Khan's army surpassed the military force of other Afghan principalities. One reason was the amir's personal attention and the assistance he received from experienced Afghan and foreign officers. A British soldier named Campbell, who served in Shah Shuja's army and was wounded at the Kandahar Battle in 1834, was captured by Amir Dost Mohammad after the defeat of Shah Shuja. He then converted to Islam and changed his name to General Sher Mohammed Khan. The "general" helped Kabul in organizing and training of the army.

The standing army of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan, as estimated by Alexander Burnes during his visit to Kabul in 1837–1838, consisted of 12,000 to 13,000 horse, 1,000 of which were Qezil-Bashs. Of the cavalry 9,000 were considered well trained and highly efficient. Due to the national character of the Afghans and the nature of the terrain and weather, the mass of the Afghan army comprised cavalry. Such a structure of the army ensured rapid deployment over immense distances but undermined battlefield sustainability if the cavalry charges failed to carry the day. The men and their horses were hardy, self-reliant, and, as light cavalry, the equal of any in the world. The cavalry comprised two categories of horsemen. A contingent of some 3,000 troopers were riding government horses and called *'Amala-i-Sarkari* (عملهٔ سرکاری) or "government employees," and the others were riders of their own horses,

termed *Khod-Aspa* (خود اسپه), or "riders of own horses." The *'Amala-i-Sarkari* received pay under a new system of raising troops introduced by Amir Dost Mohammad, who based a great deal of his strength on the system.[29] The cavalry was organized in units of various numbers ranging between 100 and 200 horses. Several of these units were placed under the command of the amir's sons. Among them Mohammad Akbar Khan commanded 2,000 horse, Mohammad Afzal Khan 600 horse, Ghulam Haidar Khan 1,000 horse. The other sons and the nobles commanded smaller forces.[30]

Foot musketeers (*Jezailchis*), numbering 2,500, were armed with long-barreled harquebus or matchlocks (*Jezails*) used with a rest. These units were significantly improved under Mohammad Akbar Khan, who armed the best and the most confident Ghilzai troops with such weapons. The Sardar personally superintended the manufacture of *Jezails* in the Afghan armories. In fact, throughout the nineteenth century the long-barrel *Jezails* were identified with the Ghilzai guerrilla fighters, who aptly used them as snipers against fixed targets and moving columns in mountain passes. These were the kind of fighters that Winston Churchill defined as warriors with "the ferocity of the *Zulu*, . . . the craft of the *Redskin* and the marksmanship of the *Boer*."[31] The infantry of the amir, organized by Nawab Abdul Samad, Mr. Campbell, and Dr. Harlan,[32] were mostly Afghan mountaineers and were very effective and adapted to the mountain warfare. As Mohan Lal asserts, they were well adapted "to fight under the shelter of bushes, walls, and hollow places where the uniform movement of our foot regiments will not permit them to exercise their discipline as the Afghans can. Their muskets are also better for throwing balls to a long distance than those of England. This part of the army numbered about 1,500 men."[33]

The Afghan artillery comprised 50 cannon, some of them well cast, in addition to the guns captured from the Sikhs in the Battle of Jamrud in 1837. As in all other Afghan armies, the Kabuli forces were expert shots with light camel-mounted guns known as Zanbouraks, or *Shahanaks* and *Shahins*. The amir's army had about 200 such weapons.

The amir's military was a paid army. The soldiers were paid yearly in cash, grain, grass, sheep, and blankets and cooking oil, which, after obtaining an order (*barat*) from the paymaster, they got from local tax collectors and the headmen of the villages. The general pay of a horseman was 12 tomans or 120 Kabuli rupees, equal to about 10 pounds annually. The pay covered the expenses of the trooper to feed and clothe himself, as well as his family and his mount. This clearly indicates the low cost of living in those years in Afghanistan. The foot soldiers were paid not more than 84 rupees or 7 pounds annually, in the same manner as the cavalry troops. But a greater number of infantry soldiers were drawing only six pounds a year.

The Afghan troopers fought with swords or lances and were hooded with metal helmets and protected by chain mail. The standard firearm of both the cavalry and the infantry was the *Jezail*, a locally made, long-barreled musket with a .50 to .75 or larger caliber. The extended length of the *Jezail* barrel made it heavier than the typical musket of the time, allowing a larger caliber and a heavier ball. It usually weighed 12 to 14 pounds, compared to nine to 10 pounds for a typical musket. Because of its heavy weight, the weapon could absorb more force from the round, resulting in reduced recoil during the discharge. Due to its long barrel and weight, sometimes used on a rest, the *Jezail* had a longer range and was more effective in comparison to common muskets. It was more effective than the smoothbore Brown Bess muskets used by the British soldiers during the first Anglo-Afghan war. The Brown Bess had an effective range of 150 yards and an accurate range of 50 yards. Eyewitness

accounts indicate that the *Jezail*'s effective range was several times longer. "The long rifle of the Afghans," wrote Captain Abbott in November 1841, "kill[s] at 800 yards, while our musket has not half that range, and we wage a most unequal war with the mountaineers, who never allow us to approach them within musket shot."[34] The range advantage of the *Jezail* allowed Afghan fighters to use it effectively from the top of the cliffs and high ground against the enemy columns passing through the defiles and narrow valleys.

According to some British soldiers of the time, the *Jezail* fired a heavier ball, three times the size of a musket ball, with accuracy at 400 yards,[35] but its low rate of fire was its disadvantage. It fired one round every two or three minutes compared to the two or three rounds per minute of the musket. Therefore, the Afghan *Jezail* would be overwhelmed on the close battlefield by coordinated and disciplined volleys of musketry.[36] It was not a good offensive weapon, but as a long-range sniping arm at fixed targets in the mountains, it proved to be very deadly. It also had a devastating effect in the defense against advancing troops in the open. In the attack, a soldier usually carried two or three loaded *Jezails* with him and after discharging all of them at the enemy he either withdrew to a safe distance to reload or assaulted the enemy line with sword and shield.

Reared in the tactics of irregular warfare, the Afghans were considered excellent skirmishers and experienced foragers, for they possessed the necessary qualifications to a much greater degree than the Europeans.[37] Their mastery of plebian methods of fighting instilled in them the natural skills of independent maneuvering, with each detachment fighting with more flexibility and with resilience unrestrained by strict command and control. Such behavior provided separate groups with the pliability to ensure their safety under defeat and exploit the situation to their advantage in victory. The

lack of close-order training and drills, however, was a deficiency in set-piece combat when a commander tended not to get decisively engaged and risk a defeat but to save himself and his men for a future showdown. But their action against a beaten and retiring army was rapid and decisive, resulting in the close pursuit of the enemy to inflict the heaviest loss on him and seize booty.

The Campaign Plan

At the end of November 1838, as the Bengal troops assembled at Firozpur, the Bombay division numbering 5,000 men under the command of Sir John Keane was to debark on the coast of Sindh. The combined army consisted of two bodies numbering 25,000 troops, separated from each other by 780 miles. A major operational challenge was to synchronize the advance of the two converging bodies of unequal mobility on land. The Bengal force traveling by land was road-mobile, while the Bombay division arrived by sea and was immovable since it needed ground transportation, including thousands of camels and other draft animals. The main body of forces was ordered to march in a southwesterly direction through Bahawalpur and Sindh, crossing the Indus River at Sukkur and then turning northwest to Shikarpur. From there the Army of the Indus would move up the Bolan Pass to Quetta and then across the Kozhak Pass to Kandahar.

In December 1838, as the Bengal division moved south from Firozpur, the Bombay division under Sir John Keane sailed northward and landed at the mouth of the Indus in Sindh. Opposition from the amirs of Sindh to the deployment of the British forces and the use of the facilities in the area was neutralized by the British show of force. British agents negotiated a treaty whereby the amirs paid tribute to the British, and the Bombay division joined the main force without further incident.

The organization of transport and supplies was the toughest challenge faced by the Army of the Indus during its long march. The traditional logistics system of the Indian armies still entailed long transport convoys and a huge moving city of merchants, service providers, and material suppliers trailing the army. In such a system, the regimental merchants and agents fed the men with staple food items, supplied equipment, and provided every needed store except fighting material. The huge numbers of followers who maintained the moving bazaar extended the length of the columns that had to be supplied and protected in time of need. According to the official accounts of the march, the camels were so numerous that although the army marched in several columns, forage could not be obtained in sufficient quantity in many places between Shikarpur and the Bolan Pass. Additionally, most of the officers had too many camels to carry their personal effects, large tents, and too much baggage. “An army of tents and camels” was how an Afghan officer in Ghazni pejoratively referred to the Army of the Indus.

As the army of Bengal moved out of its concentration area in Firozpur, the commissariat supplies that accompanied the army (numbering 9,500 troops and about 38,000 camp followers) included 30 days’ supplies of all kinds, slaughter cattle for 2.5 months, and additional quantities of grain sent down by boat to Rohree. Depots were established at Bahawalpur, Shikarpur, and some other points. A reserve depot was established at Firozpur containing 50,000 maunds (4 million pounds) of wheat[38] and a two-month supply of other grains. Nearly 15,000 camels were used to carry supplies only for the army of Bengal as it left Firozpur. Each column carried a certain quantity of supplies with it.[39]

The campaign plan violated many tested military principles and was a high-risk venture. The lack of clarity of the objective continued to haunt the campaign all the way to its ruinous conclusion. The principle of the unity of command

was disturbed by the habitual disagreement between the political and military leaders, who did not see eye to eye on assessing the situation on the ground. This undermined the process of making timely and effective decisions to respond to crises. Flexibility of action was seriously sacrificed by subjecting military requirements to political exigencies. The long march to the areas of expected military action (Kandahar and Kabul) provided the Afghans with plenty of time to discover the British intention and plan, thus squandering surprise. Disregard for security precautions constantly exposed the British force to numerous risks of Afghan attack and starvation. The main body had to cross through 1,200 miles of difficult country, passing through two major defiles that could be successfully blocked by a few hundred resolute defenders. In the words of Durand, “a single serious check was almost inevitable ruin, and nearly tantamount to destruction. . . . Never before, during the history of the British power in India, had so wild, ill-considered, and adventurous a scheme of far-distant aggression been entertained.”[40]

The Clausewitzian notions of “friction” and “uncertainty” found their full meaning during the course of the long march. In the recent history of Afghanistan, the size of any invading and occupying force was determined by the availability of supplies from local sources and the challenge of keeping the line of communication and supply open. A large force was hard to maintain in a poorly resourced land, and a smaller one faced defeat by the locals. During the march, the Army of the Indus had to carry supplies not only for the men but also for tens of thousands of draft animals and a large number of camp followers (often larger than the number of the combat troops). The procurement of supplies from local sources, when they were available, produced negative political and social outcomes since it deprived the population of access to the limited resources.

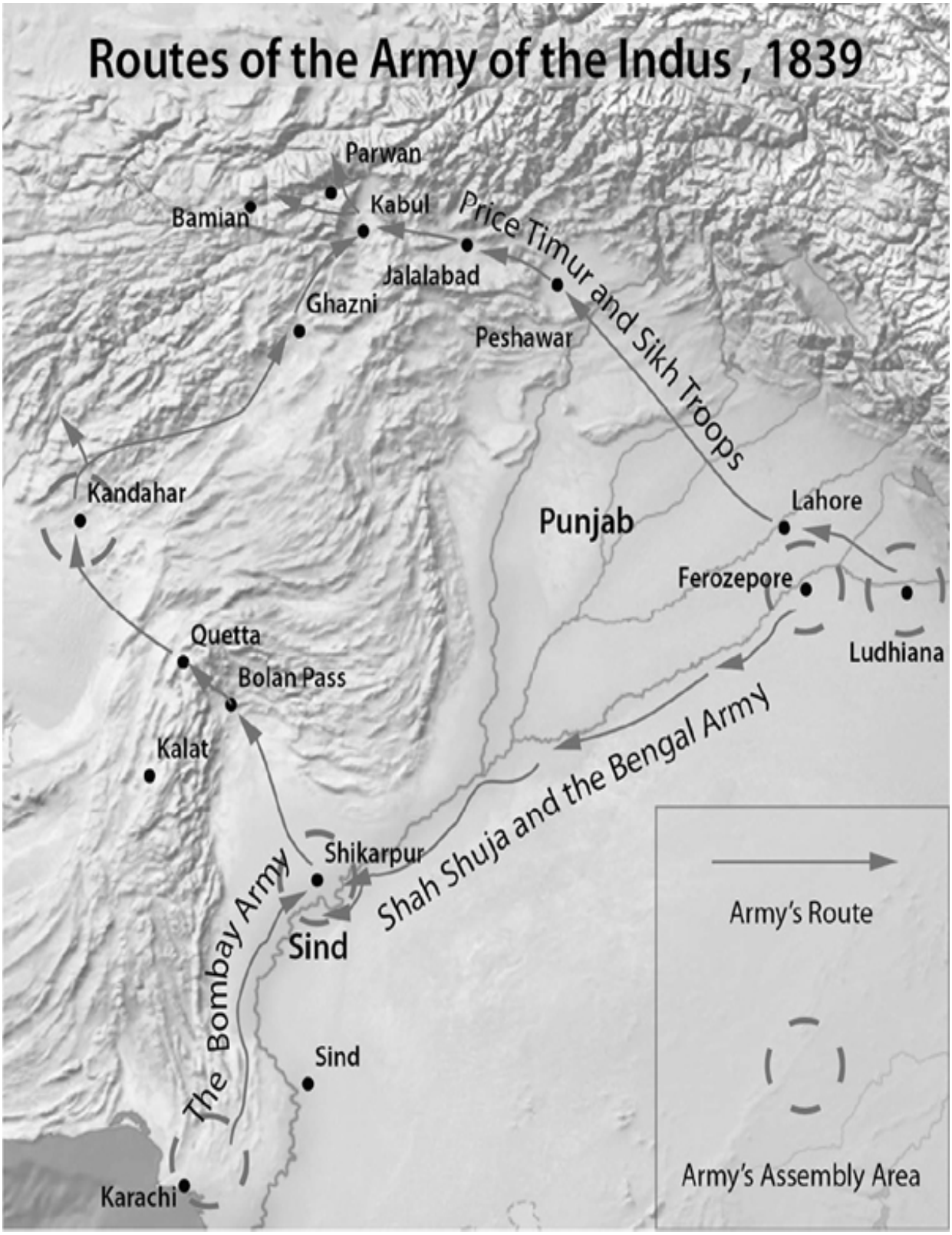
Moreover, the strain of the harsh climate and difficult terrain took a heavy toll on the mental and physical capabilities of the troops, particularly the Indian *Sepoys*, who found the weather and the desolate topography hard to endure. To quote one of them, “Our march was in the middle of cold weather and yet the heat was such that numbers of European soldiers and *Sepoys* died from the effect; on one day 35 men fell victim to it. At this stage the *Sepoy* army had almost determined to return to India and there were signs of mutiny in all three armies [the Bengal, Bombay, and Shah Shuja armies].”[41]

The Long March

The long march from upper Sindh to Kandahar and Kabul took nearly eight months with an average of 10 miles per day. Although the army did not face major military resistance, except at Ghazni, the invading columns struggled along the way with the tough task of managing the movement of a large army with its extended baggage trains over long stretches on difficult terrain in an unfriendly environment. The transportation of large quantities of supplies demanded the availability and use of large pools of draft animals, camels, and wagons and other transport carriages. More than 30,000 camels were utilized for the transportation of goods and material, and still there were camel shortages that required prioritizing the allotment of camels to different elements.

This made the marching columns long and slow. Daily it took many hours to form columns and then more hours again to disperse into the next bivouac area. The camels marched at the rate of two miles per hour, and a column of 3,500 animals stretched over a distance of 10 miles in single file. Accordingly the entire length of the column passed a single point in about five hours. Larger convoys took longer.

Therefore the combat forces and their logistic tails were split into several self-sufficient groups that marched at one-day intervals. For example, the Bengal army was split into six or seven columns, each following the preceding columns at an interval of one day. Further, the Bengal army was moving at a distance of about 10 to 15 days ahead of the Bombay army.



Routes of the Army of the Indus, 1839.

Source: John H. Walker, *Beyond the Khyber Pass* (New York: Random House, 1990).

The Bengal division, which was moving several days ahead of the rest of the army, left Shikarpur on February 23, 1839, with one and a half month's supply, and with a similar quantity remaining in depot there, to follow if required.[42] As the army finally arrived in Quetta, the shortfall of supplies produced famine in the army. On March 28, two days after his arrival in Quetta, General Cotton put his forces on half rations and the camp followers on quarter rations. Alexander Burnes visited and negotiated with Mehrab Khan, the chief of Kalat, to ease the supply problem. The latter could provide only a small quantity of grain due to the drought that had hit the area the previous year. The khan also sent a considerable number of sheep to the army. Eventually, the khan of Kalat reluctantly signed a treaty whereby, in return for an annual subsidy of 1.5 lakh of rupees (15,000 pounds), he agreed to "use his best efforts to procure supplies, carriage and guards to the British forces in the Kalat province."

The Army of the Indus marched out of Quetta to Kandahar on April 7, and the leading columns ascended the Kozhak Pass on April 14. Although the march to the Kandahar plain was not seriously disrupted by hostile action, the Afghans cut off the water of the Kadani River, causing a serious water-supply problem within the British camp. Measures to restore the flow of water failed as the local forces repeatedly diverted the flow of the stream. Afghan accounts indicate that the Kandahar leaders had dispatched an army commanded by several Kandahar tribal chiefs to block the advance of the British forces at a position near Qala-i-Fathullah, about 54 miles south of Kandahar.[43] But due to the defection of a prominent Kandahar tribal chief, Haji Taj Mohammad Khan Kakar (often referred to as Haji Khan

Kakar), the intended attack did not materialize.[44] Meanwhile, British intelligence had established a wide network of spies and agents in Afghanistan ahead of the advance of the Army of the Indus. Mohan Lal, an intelligence officer in the service of the East India Company, was one of the most active recruiters of agents and collaborators. Fluent in Persian and well versed in the region's culture, Mohan Lal had traveled in the garb of a Muslim under the pseudonyms of "Agha Hassan Kashmiri" and "Mirza Quli Kashmiri" in Persia and Afghanistan, collecting information vital for his British bosses. During the Anglo-Afghan war he was instrumental in setting up and expanding the British intelligence network in Afghanistan. He managed to win the services of some key collaborators such as Mohammed Tahir, Haji Khan Kakar, Abdul Majid Khan, Akhundzada Ghulam, and Mullah Nassuh in Kandahar and Sardar Abdul Rashid Khan, a nephew of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan, in Ghazni.

Occupation of Kandahar

After failing to meet the enemy in the field, and smarting from the defection of Haji Khan to Shah Shuja's camp, the Kandahari Sardars, Kohendil Khan, Rahmdil Khan, and Sherdil Khan returned to Kandahar. There, they intended to resist the British invasion by combined actions from within and without the city. They intended to frequently sally out to hit the besieging enemy while mobilizing the tribes around Kandahar to attack the British forces from the rear. However, Mullah Nassuh, who had secret links with Shah Shuja's camp and his allies, dissuaded them from making a "futile effort" to resist. The Sardars fled to Girishk, leaving Kandahar open to the enemy. The escape of the Barakzai Sardars convinced the Kandaharis that this time Shah Shuja had returned to stay with the support of a strong British army. Many tribal leaders, including Haji Dost Mohammad Khan Is'haqzai,

Habibullah Khan Sarkani, Faiztalab Khan Noorzai, Ramazan Khan Ghilzai, Akhtar Khan Alizai, Sarfaraz Khan Is'haqzai, and others, immediately submitted to the shah and each brought with him a detachment of horse to serve the returning monarch. A few days later, on April 25, 1839, Shah Shuja triumphantly entered Kandahar.

Shah Shuja was crowned in the mosque of Ahmed Shah on May 8, 1839. It was an official ceremony with military honors and gun salutes to give his elevation an aura of legitimacy. A day before the coronation, the British envoy had Shah Shuja sign an eight-article supplement to the previous treaty that provided for the continued presence of a resident British envoy at the Afghan court. The document prevented the Afghan side from allowing any European persons to reside in Afghanistan unless approved by the British authorities. The treaty stipulated that an army for the shah would be raised and commanded by British officers, not to exceed 50, unless the shah requested more. Depending on its affordability, the cost of the army was to be paid for by the Afghan treasury.[45]

Five days later, a combined force of 1,700 men under Brigadier Sale proceeded to Girishk to defeat the fugitive Kandahari Sardars. But two days before the arrival of the British force, the Sardars fled the town. The commander of the Girishk fort, however, remained loyal to Kohendil Khan and refused to surrender. Sale stormed the fortress and the garrison was put to the sword. After leaving an infantry battalion from the shah's contingent and 200 irregular cavalry, the expeditionary force returned to Kandahar at the end of May. Meanwhile, the Kandahar Sardars retired to Persia, where Mohammad Shah received them well and bestowed upon them the little town of Sher-Babek as a fief. The town is located between the provinces of Fars and Kerman, and Mohammad Shah gave them the revenues of the whole of that district, amounting to 12,000 tomans annually.

When the Army of the Indus arrived in Kandahar, most of the troops had been on half rations for the preceding 48 days. The army had to halt for about two months in Kandahar to replenish, regroup, and make efforts to win the support of the tribes. The British minister also sent a mission to Herat, headed by Major Todd, and provided for financial assistance to relieve the city and repair its defenses that were damaged during the Persian assault. Making use of his new power and the British gold, Shah Shuja reached out to tribal leaders in order to accommodate the loyal chiefs and replace the defiant ones with compliant chiefs. This set a precedent for future dealings with the tribes. The Ghilzais of western Afghanistan, however, showed no inclination to submit to Shah Shuja and his British supporters. Neither power nor the British gold brought significant collaboration. This disdain generally continued throughout the British occupation of the country.

Shah Shuja proclaimed his son, Timur Mirza, the governor of Kandahar. Then, on June 27, he and the Army of the Indus marched toward Ghazni, 229 miles to the northeast. On that day, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, one of the parties to the regime replacement, died in Lahore. The army covered the distance to Ghazni in 25 days, with an average rate of nine miles per day. The march of the troops was much impeded by the difficulties of the road, the great number of camels, and the large crowds of camp followers, who were more numerous than the soldiers. No major resistance, however, stopped the progress of the army. Nevertheless, two Ghilzai chiefs, Abdul Rahman with 1,500 horse and Gul Mohammad (Guloo) with 3,000 mounted tribesmen (mostly of the Tokhi and Hotak clans), maintained screening columns on the British flanks all the way from Kandahar, waiting for an opportunity to strike. They very much expected Amir Dost Mohammad to take the field and attack the “infidels,” since only the amir could legitimize the *Jihad* against the *Farangi*. As in Kandahar, Shah Shuja put two other leading figures from the defying Ghilzai

tribes as chiefs of their clans. Afghan rulers and foreign occupiers often pitted rival clan chiefs of the same tribe against each other in order to gain control over tribal politics. Bribery and authorizing the collection of road tolls were other effective instruments of control. But this policy only worked when the political and economic interests of the tribes were at stake. The method rarely functioned when the honor and traditional values of the nation as a whole were violated. Violations mobilized the people, particularly when summoned by the call of *Jihad* against foreign occupation. Then the group dynamics overwhelmed individual and parochial interests and shaped public behavior.

The Battle of Ghazni

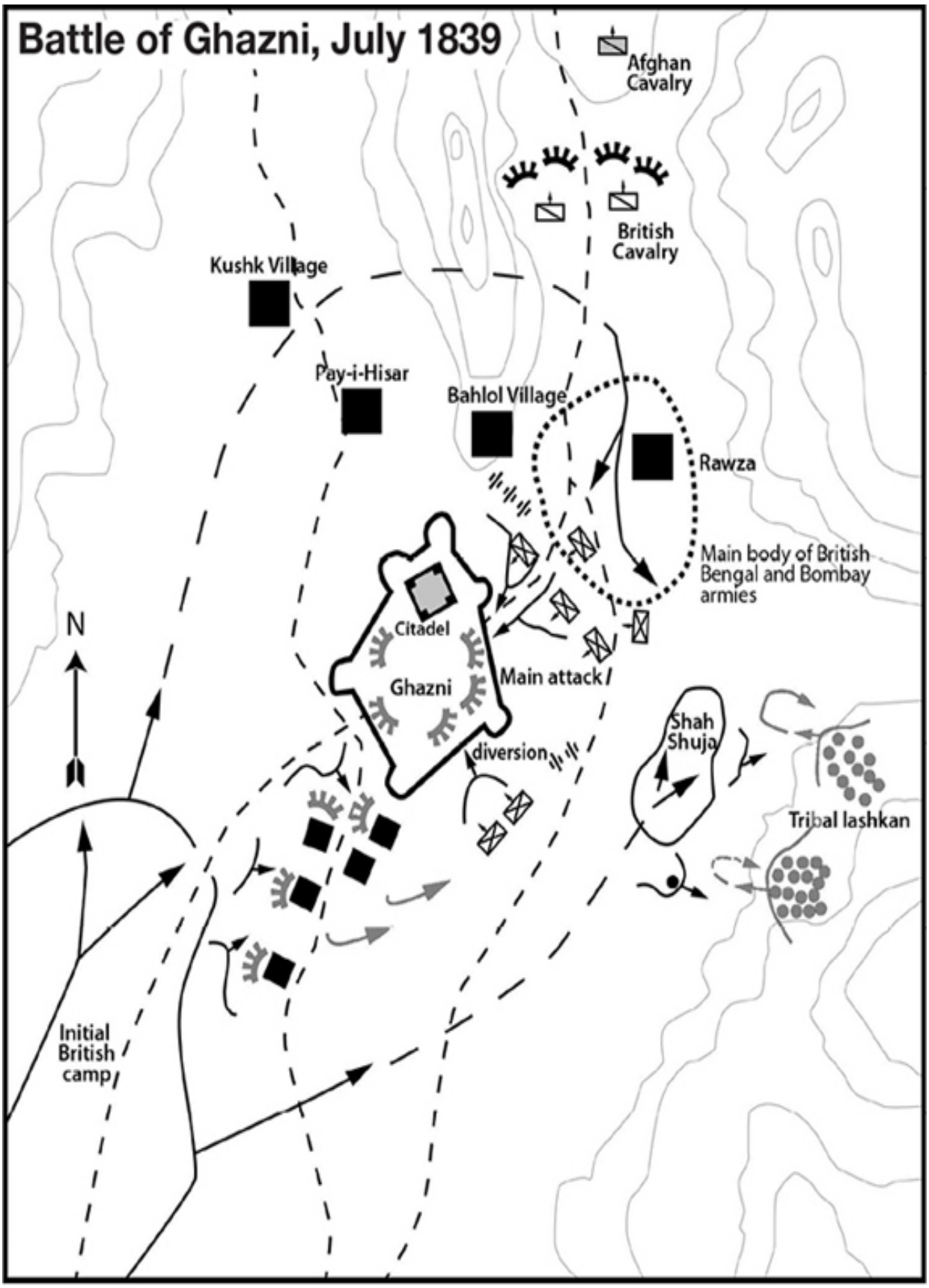
On the hot summer day of July 18, as the Army of the Indus reached within two days' march of Ghazni, its columns were stretched over many miles along the dusty highway. The army needed to close up for a battle against the walled city of Ghazni. It took two days of forced marches to consolidate the force. By July 20, Shah Shuja and the center column, as well as General Willshire's corps of European infantry, had caught up with the leading elements and General Keane. The suburbs of the town were teeming with visible crowds of curious spectators, while unseen snipers hid in the fruit orchards and behind the deeply furrowed rows of the vineyards.[46] The British forces were advancing in their marching columns with the artillery emplaced on the road and with the cavalry moving over the plain to the right and the infantry on the slightly elevated ground to the left. The leading columns were met with musket fire from the villages close to the city walls. The British infantry deployed and pushed the attackers back after a series of skirmishes in the gardens along the right bank of the Ghazni River. Then the artillery came into action against the city battlements.

The army initially camped on the southwest side of the city, where it was exposed to cannon fire from the ramparts. The British moved their camp out of the defender's artillery range, using a seven-mile circuitous route across the hills to the Kabul side of the city.[47] The new location also blocked the expected approach route of Amir Dost Mohammad from Kabul. Captain Havelock, an aide to General Cotton, later wrote that they had to move around the city to ascend the steep hill to the northwest and descend across the hills to the northeast of the Ghazni, passing through the ancient Ghaznavid minarets to the south. There, he wrote,

> we now saw that a grand line of encampment was established to the northward of Ghuznee [Ghazni]. The troops and court of the Shah were on the left, next to them the British cavalry, the head quarters of the Commander-in-Chief, and the artillery in the centre; near to it the infantry from Bombay, and our 4th brigade; and on the right, resting their flank on the heights to the north-west, were the brigades of the 1st division.[48]

The narrative and the terrain around Ghazni indicate that the British forces might have moved north along the old Ghazni-Noburjah road, crossing the Ghazni River near Kushk, ascending the Pass-i-Hissar hills, and crossing over to Rawza through the Turk-e Hazrat hills. Part of the troops may have swung across the southeastern plain and through the foothills of Koh-i Bad and the Sakhi hills to the Rawza district. Ghazni was garrisoned by 2,500 to 3,000 troops under Dost Mohammad's son, Sardar Ghulam Haidar Khan. Meanwhile, the amir's other son, Sardar Mohammad Afzal Khan, was outside the city, commanding a cavalry regiment supported by Ghilzai tribesmen of the Zurmat and Shilgar districts, southeast of Ghazni. Afghan sources exaggerate the number of the tribesman at 12,000 who were under their chief, Mehtar Musa.[49] Other accounts put the number at 2,000 horse and 1,000 foot fighters,[50] which seems more accurate. They intended to attack the British forces once they camped at Ghazni.

The British discovered that the fortifications of Ghazni were much stronger than expected. Situated on high ground, the city was surrounded by a wall 60 to 70 feet high with a moat in front of it. Since the British army left its siege trains and artillery in Kandahar, these obstacles were insurmountable using the available field guns. Nor was there much prospect of quickly reducing the fortification by scaling the walls or mining under them. Laying siege to the city before the siege artillery arrived from Kandahar would give Amir Dost Mohammad more time to counter the invasion. Shah Shuja, eager to reach Kabul as soon as possible and claim his ancestral throne, advised Keane to seal off the city, bypass it, and move on to Kabul. But Keane was keen to remove this threat to the rear of his forces and to secure his line of communication. The only other way was to blow open a city gate with explosives and take the city with a surprise attack.


Battle of Ghazni, July 1839
Afghan Cavalry
British Cavalry
Kushk Village
Pay-i-Hisar
Bahlol Village
Rawza
Main body of British Bengal and Bombay armies
N
Citadel
Ghazni
Main attack
diversion
Shah Shuja
Tribal lashkan
Initial British camp

The Battle of Ghazni, July 22, 1839.

A prominent deserter from the garrison, who had joined the British camp as it approached the city, offered the British command valuable information about the weak points in the fortifications. He reported that while all gates of the city were bricked up, the Kabul Gate[51] was not and could be blown in with gunpowder. The deserter was none other than a first nephew of Amir Dost Mohammad named Sardar Abdul Rashid. Mohan Lal had established close relations with him during his previous stay in Kabul, when he was a member of the Burnes mission. Mohan Lal states that he had sent a secret letter to Rashid asking him to desert and to collaborate with the winning side. The actual way that the sardar's reply message was delivered would serve as a plot in a great spy novel. The sardar asked one of his trusted followers to disguise himself as a zealot who was seeking martyrdom while killing an "infidel" or being himself killed by the invading "unbelievers." His follower shaved his beard, clothed himself in green, and, bearing a drawn sword in hand while uttering the holy names of God and the prophet, spurred his horse toward the British camp, threatening to kill anyone who would try to stop him. In this way, the phony *ghazi* arrived in the British camp bearing a letter from Abdul Rashid to the British agent. Soon after this, the traitor sardar slipped out of Ghazni and fled to the British camp, where Mohan Lal "introduced him to the envoy."[52]

While British reconnaissance was sizing up the strength of the fortifications from an observation post on Bahlol Hill opposite the citadel, they saw a horseman enter the city through the Kabul Gate. This confirmed that the gate was still not bricked up and was kept open for communication with the Kabul road. The British decided to blow open the gate and seize the fortress by a coup de main. During the night of July 21, British observers noticed an exchange of blue light signals between the citadel and the mountain tops,

which bounded the valley to the east, possibly the Koh-i Sakhi Hills. The meaning of these signals was apparent the following day around noon when thousands of *ghazis* of the Ghilzai hordes descended from the heights like a flood toward the Shah Shuja encampment, which stood the closest to the foot of the hills. The heaviest gun from the city citadel (the brass 48-pounder *Zabar-zan* cannon) fired in support of the *ghazis*. Trumpets sounded and the shah's cavalry under Major Nicolson, supported by artillery, quickly countered the attack of the Ghilzai horse and foot, containing them before they fanned out onto the plain. Meanwhile, Captain Outram moved a cavalry detachment to outflank the retreating *ghazis* but they swiftly passed over the heights. Outram later recounted his experience, stating that the *ghazis* "were, with trivial loss on our side, compelled to re-ascend the heights, leaving behind one of their standards in our possession, and four or five of their number killed in the conflict."[53]

Although the tribesmen suffered minor casualties in the battle, some 50 to 80 of them were taken prisoner. They were brought in and paraded before the shah. The captives began insulting the puppet king, and one of them even stabbed a royal guardsman. The angered shah ordered their beheading en masse. William Kaye quotes an eyewitness to the bloody massacre as saying:

> I was walking one day in camp, and came upon the King's tents, at the rear of which I saw a fearfully bloody sight. There were forty or fifty men young and old. Many were dead. Many others at their last gasp; others with hands tied behind them; some others standing, awaiting their doom; and the King's executioners and other servants amusing themselves with hacking and maiming the poor wretches indiscriminately with their long swords and knives.[54]

Briefly before the butchery, Macnaghten was quoted as commending the "humane instincts of the king."

Preparations for blowing up the Kabul Gate and storming the fortress began. Artillery was positioned to cover the approach of the light companies of the three British

regiments (the 3rd, 13th, and 17th Foot) and the one Bengal European regiment formed into a storming party commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Dennie of the 13th Foot. The remainder of the three British regiments formed the main attack column, which was commanded by Brigadier Sale. The 16th Bengal Native Infantry Regiment was to make a diversionary attack against the Bazar Gate opening to the south. Three other regiments of Native infantry formed the reserve under General Cotton. High winds prevented the garrison from detecting the preparations for the attack. The moon set at half past ten and the overcast was gloomy and mysterious. “The night of the 22nd was dark,” wrote Lieutenant Durand (later Major General Sir Henry Durand), who commanded the demolition party, “and a few drops at one time threatened rain, but none fell. At midnight the batteries of artillery moved from camp, and were gradually put into position at about 400 yards’ distance from the ramparts. The enemy, so alert on the previous night when they expected the attack, took no notice of the rumble of the artillery, and suffered it to occupy its ground without molestation.”[55]

Around 3:00 AM on July 23, while the artillery was setting up positions on the high ground to the right of the Kabul Gate, a party of engineers commanded by Captain Peat of the Bombay Sappers and Miners moved to the gate. Durand, commanding the explosion party, recalls,

> the morning star was high in the heavens, and the first red streak of approaching morning was on the horizon, when the explosion party stepped forward to its duty led by the engineer Durand, they advanced to within 150 yards of the works, when a challenge from the walls, a shot, and a shout, told that the party was discovered. Instantly the garrison were on the alert; their musketry rang free and quick from the ramparts, and blue lights suddenly glared on the top of the battlements, brilliantly illuminating the approach to the gate.[56]

Peat’s party rushed forward to the wall and Durand’s men placed 300 pounds of powder bags against the gate and

unrolled a length of quick-match fuse. The explosion blew in the gate. Dennie's four light companies rushed through the shattered gate and met the Afghan defenders in a ferocious hand-to-hand fight in the semidark of the gate tunnel. Dennie was supposed to occupy the ramparts on both sides of the gateway in order to secure that key point. Instead, he pushed on into the town under the pressure of heavy musketry fire. The situation created a gap between the rear of the storming party and the head of the advance column under Sale. This gap was exploited by the Afghans, who launched a counterattack that separated the Dennie and Sale forces. The fierce fighting continued, during which Afghan swordsmen dropped boldly down from the ramparts and fell, sword in hand, upon the leading elements of the Sale column. The narrow passage at the gate was overcrowded as the two sides struggled hand to hand.

Brigadier Sale himself was struck down by a saber cut to the face. During a desperate struggle with his opponent, Sale sliced his hand on the Afghan's sword. When Major Kershaw saw the brigadier's struggle for his life, he rushed to his rescue and ran the Afghan through, but the tough tribesman continued to fight until Sale split his adversary's skull with his sabre. The commander stood up again and issued his orders, and his main column was soon within the fortress.[57] The supporting column, under Colonel Croker, then pushed forward, and the reserve followed in due course. The column cut its way through the gate into the streets beyond. The Afghan garrison, numbering 2,500, fought with unexpected energy. Reportedly, almost all the dead were pierced by bayonets, and very few received gunshot wounds.[58] Afghan sources claim that the British troops were thrown back from the gate several times before they overwhelmed the limited number of Afghan swordsmen.[59] Sita Ram states that some European companies were driven back and two companies of *Sepoys* charged and carried the gateway.[60] The citadel was

undefended, and the city was in British hands by sunrise as the colors of the 13th and 17th regiments fluttered in the strong morning breeze on the ramparts of the Ghazni citadel. British casualties were 200 killed and wounded, while the Afghans lost 500 killed and 1,600 prisoners. The number of Afghan wounded is not known.

With the end of the fighting, Sardar Haidar Khan was taken prisoner. Shah Shuja wished to put him to death, but the British persuaded him to change his decision. The prince and his family were treated respectfully, and according to Mohan Lal, the royal prisoner was appreciative of the way he was accommodated by the British.[61] But this did not stop him from showing his opposition to the invasion of his country. When the sardar met General Keane, he spoke bluntly, saying that he was fighting for his country and his amir, and that the Afghans never annoyed the British, so why therefore, he asked, had they come into his country to set up a king whom they all hated? “Kill me if you like,” he told the general, “but if you let me go, I shall ever be found as your enemy and all in my power to excite the people against you and drive you all out of Kabul.”[62] After a one-week stay in Ghazni, Keane marched out of Ghazni toward Kabul on July 30, 1839. He left a garrison behind consisting of one Native infantry regiment, some artillery, and the sick and wounded.

Amir Dost Mohammad’s Plans

Once the governor general publicly declared war on the amir of Kabul, Dost Mohammad had about seven months to prepare to face the enemy in Kandahar and more than 10 months to prepare to meet him near Kabul. It looked like plenty of time and space to prepare to offer strong resistance to the enemy at several consecutive defensive lines. But strategically, time and space were not the decisive issues; political and military capacities were.

Faced with the impending invasion, the amir's plans and assumptions changed as the situation developed. Initially he expected that the main thrust of the invasion would come from the eastern strategic corridor across Punjab, Peshawar, and the Khyber Pass, targeting Kabul through Jalalabad. This was the historic axis of military operations conducted across this South and Central Asian space. Later, once it became obvious that the British army, along with the ex-king Shah Shuja, had taken the southwestern axis through the Bolan Pass, Quetta, and Kandahar, the amir presumed that the British forces, after capturing Kandahar, would march on Herat to raise the Persian siege or recapture the city. After the fall of Kandahar, the British marched toward Kabul, and the amir discovered that he was facing a two-pronged invasion with the main British thrust coming from the southwest and the supporting Sikh attack coming from the east through Peshawar and Jalalabad.

The amir's final plan was to cover both axes. He dispatched his son Akbar Khan to cover the eastern access to Kabul. Blocking the Khyber Pass in the face of the advancing enemy would be a reasonable tactic that could stop or delay the invading forces. He therefore advised Akbar Khan to encourage the Khyber tribes to block the defile while he himself, with the Kabul army, would sit at Dakka as a reserve force. The fall of Kandahar and the amir's defeat at Ghazni caused the tribes to waiver, allowing Lieutenant Colonel Claude Wade, the governor general's political agent for Punjab and the North West Frontier, and the Sikh army to pass through the Khyber region without serious opposition.

On the southern axis, Dost Mohammad counted on the combined action of his army inside Ghazni with the Ghilzais' attack on the British forces to delay their advance. He assumed that engaging the enemy in delaying action in Ghazni would also impede the movement of enemy forces on the eastern approaches and discourage the Sikhs from making an aggressive incursion through the formidable

Khyber Pass. He also assumed that after reaching Ghazni, the British army might decide to contain it with a small force and advance on Kabul, in which case the amir's forces in Ghazni would attack the enemy columns from the rear halfway between Ghazni and Kabul at Shaikh-Abad, while the amir would deal with it from the Kabul side. He hoped that such an action would put him in an advantageous position when dealing with Shah Shuja and his British backers. The amir's calculations crumbled in the face of the evolving situation. He soon felt threatened from three directions: the south, the east, and the north.

In the east, on July 22, on the eve of the fall of Ghazni, Lieutenant Colonel Wade and Prince Timur with 10,000 foot and horse, began their operation on the Khyber front. After five days' advance, they arrived in Ali Masjid at the eastern mouth of the Khyber Pass. The pass had been evacuated by the Khybaris. Meanwhile, the news of the fall of Ghazni caused Amir Dost Mohammad to recall Sardar Akbar Khan from the Khyber front. This opened the way for the Wade column to march through the defile unopposed. The success made by the British forces in the south and the retreat of Akbar Khan to Kabul prevented the Khybaris from taking action and eased the march of the joint forces of Prince Timur and the Sikhs toward Kabul.

To the north, British agents managed to stir up an anti–Dost Mohammad uprising in Kohdaman and Kohistan, about 30 miles from Kabul. The conspiracy was coordinated by the British spymaster Mohan Lal, who reactivated a network of agents he had established during his previous visit to Kabul as part of the Burnes mission. Among them, Ghulam Khan Popalzai played the key role. After the fall of Kandahar, Mohan Lal sent 40,000 rupees through a Shikarpuri banker to Ghulam Khan and asked him to incite unrest against the amir in the northern districts of the capital. The Popalzai chief coopted certain influential persons in Kabul and secretly left the city for Kohistan, where he distributed British money and

enlisted local chiefs of Nejrao, Panjsher, Ghorband, Kohistan, and Kohdaman to support the cause of Shah Shuja against Amir Dost Mohammad. They all rose up to support the plot of Ghulam Khan against the amir of Kabul. Most of them were favorably disposed to Shah Shuja, but two years later, when they regarded the Sadozai king as merely a puppet in the hands of the British, they turned against him and his *Farangi* benefactors. Meanwhile, the citizens of Kabul were frustrated by the inactivity of the amir, while Ghulam Khan's men with the Kohistanis began to descend on Kabul and stated that they would fight the Kabulis if they allowed the amir to remain any longer in Kabul.

The amir called a *Jirga* in the garden surrounding the Timur Shah Tomb and appealed to his subjects to support him in the face of the *Farangi* invasion. He laced his speech with made-up stories of atrocities committed by the enemy, including dishonoring women and boiling infants alive. Although Nawab Jabar Khan confirmed the amir's assertions, they failed to rally the people to rise for his cause. Further, the defection of several influential tribal chiefs to the Sadozai king demoralized the amir's camp, leading to massive desertions in his army. These troubles notwithstanding, the tough amir did not give up the fight and marched at the head of the few followers who remained faithful to him. With about 6,000 men and his artillery, he moved to meet the British army. Joining with his son Akbar Khan, Dost Mohammed concentrated his forces and 30 guns at Arghandeh, about 25 miles from Kabul. This was a favorable line for defense of the capital and is conveniently located near the mouth of the Maidan Valley, leading to the shortest escape route to Bamian and further to the north.

But the amir's strategic position was rapidly weakening. He was under growing pressure from all sides. Afghan accounts state that the amir's son, Akbar Khan, was poisoned and fell seriously ill as he was evacuated from Jalalabad to the capital. Dost Mohammad Khan sent his brother, Nawab Abdul

Jabar Khan, to Sir William Macnaghten, the British minister, to negotiate a deal with Shah Shuja. Known for his peace-making talents, the nawab proposed, on behalf of and with the consent of the amir, that the chief of Kabul would submit under two conditions: first to serve as the vizier under Shah Shuja, and second to restore his son, Haidar Khan, and his family, who had become prisoners at Ghazni. The nawab, however, was coldly received in the English camp. The reception was close to insulting, and he returned, an angry man, to Kabul. The only offer given to the amir was "honorable asylum in India." This was not acceptable to the amir, but he had lost the leverage to ask for more. Disappointed with the failure of his last conciliatory offer, Amir Dost Mohammad Khan gave up the idea of facing the invading army with a dwindling and demoralized force plagued by growing defection.

On August 3, the amir abandoned his elephants, guns, and other stores at Arghandeh. He and his family, including his sick son, Akbar Khan, who was being carried in a litter, fled to Bamian with some 300 followers. Josiah Harlan, an American soldier of fortune who witnessed the flight of the amir, later wrote,

> The Prince placed his foot in the stirrup. Quick glances were exchanged betwixt his followers, formerly the nearest friends to a prosperous prince, and now the rifest enemies of a fallen friend. These signals escaped not the penetrating glance of Dost Mahomed [Mohammad]. Suddenly he sprang into the saddle. . . . The Prince turned his horse towards the dense cloud, which seemed like a shadow, enshrining his glory—plunged into the screening veil that obscured his fallen fortunes and protected him from pursuit, as he lost himself from the view of those who wistfully contemplated his Highness's person.[63]

Three days later, Ghulam Khan Popalzai and his Kohistani auxiliaries entered Kabul. The victors had hoped to take Dost Mohammad prisoner, but at Sheikhabad, halfway between Ghazni and Kabul, they found that he had escaped. A detachment under Captain Outram (150 British cavalry and 700 Afghan horse, commanded by Haji Khan Kakar) was set

out in pursuit of the amir. On August 31, as the pursuing party reached within 14 miles of the fugitive amir, Haji Khan Kakar used a secret message to warn Dost Mohammad of the danger and urged him to speed up his flight. The amir escaped the danger by making a forced march and reaching Kholm. He fought his way through attacks by the Hazaras of Deh Zangi, who had already been influenced by the news of the British advance. The amir's little escort was reduced to half its number by the time he arrived at Balkh. Initially, Dost Mohammad Khan intended to move to Persia, but Amir Nasrullah Khan Bahadur of Bukhara (1827–1860) sent an emissary to offer him shelter in his dominions. Eventually the broken amir of Kabul headed to the court of the Uzbek amir, only to experience more humiliation and suffering.

With the departure of Dost Mohammad, a host of influential chiefs and tribal figures decided to espouse the invading party and made their submission to Shah Shuja and his foreign supporters. These included Abdullah Khan Achakzai, Aziz Khan Ghilzai, Aminullah Khan Logari, and Khan Shirin Khan Qizil-Bash, each of whom commanded large followings and could put up serious resistance in Kabul. Two years later, the same chiefs led the rebellion against the British occupation that resulted in the retreat and massacre of the British army in Afghanistan. On August 7, 1839, as the Kabulis unenthusiastically watched the procession, Shah Shuja, at the head of the Army of the Indus, entered Kabul, 30 years after he was forced out of power. The entry marked the reestablishment of Shah Shuja ul-Mulk on the throne of Afghanistan.

On the eastern axis the expeditionary forces under Prince Timur and Colonel Wade did not face serious resistance. The Peshawar columns arrived in Kabul on September 3, 1839, to a pompous reception. Cotton, Burnes, and other British officers, with a guard of honor, went out to receive Prince Timur. The procession then made its way through the narrow streets of Kabul to the Bala-Hissar.

The Herat ruler did not live up to the British expectations. In spite of a treaty signed with Shah Kamran that the principality would not enter into negotiations with other states without the consent of the British resident, Vizier Yar Mohammad was soon involved in talks with Persia, seeking its protection and help in expelling the British from Afghanistan. Macnaghten's proposition to dispatch a force to Herat was overruled, and instead of sending bayonets, Auckland dispatched bags of money amounting to 200,000 pounds to Herat. But the money hardly satisfied the crafty vizier, who was taking the British gold while he continued to intrigue with the Persians. He instigated a revolt by the Durranis in Zamindawar against the foreign occupiers. Months later, Yar Mohammad gave a choice to the British resident Todd to either pay more money or withdraw the British mission from Herat. Not ready to forsake Herat, Auckland removed Todd and tried to patch up relations with the vizier.

Thus the Army of the Indus arrived in Afghanistan with some 30,000 combat troops and tens of thousands of service providers and camp followers. It covered about 1,200 miles in about 10 months with an average daily march of 11.5 miles. The army did not fight major battles except in Ghazni but suffered from occasional harassment by the locals, terrain, harsh climate, hardship, and disease. Its combat casualties were in the hundreds while the losses among the camp followers were in the thousands. The army lost about 33,000 animals, including 30,000 camels and over 1,500 horses.[64] An enormous amount of material and grain was lost to looters or left by the wayside due to the lack of transport animals.

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4 The First Anglo-Afghan War

Occupation, Rebellion, Retreat, and Retribution, 1839–1842

It is often said that for any invader it is easy to enter Afghanistan but hard to leave. It was also what the khan of Kalat warned the British officers in 1839 as the Army of the Indus was heading to Kandahar. In fact, the rugged nature of the land, the long lines of communication, the scarcity of local resources, and the independent self-reliance of the native populations, isolated by the terrain, made it difficult for invaders to maintain sufficiently large armies to hold the country while their smaller forces were unable to stand up to the perennial challenges of the numerous “village states.”

Upon the capture of Kabul and the installation of Shah Shuja on the throne, the object of the invasion seemed to have been achieved, and the British troops were expected to return home. In the “Declaration of War,” the governor-general stated that once Shah Shuja “shall be secured in power and the independence and integrity of Afghanistan established, the British army will be withdrawn.” The phrase “secured in power” was subject to different interpretations. Although the exiled king mounted the throne, his power was limited to the cities of Kandahar, Ghazni, and Kabul and was

enforced by British bayonets. Amir Dost Mohammad was driven away but not defeated and the Barakzai princes and chiefs were looking for an opportunity to regain power. The country was politically divided and financially bankrupt.

Meanwhile, Russian forces were gathering in Orenburg with the aim of advancing on Khiva, and the uncertain situation in Herat raised potential security threats in the minds of the British authorities in India. Lord Auckland suggested to Macnaghten that stationing a strong British brigade in Afghanistan, in conjunction with Shah Shuja's contingent, would be sufficient to hold the country. But Macnaghten saw the Russian move as a serious threat and unsuccessfully tried to convince Keane to send a force to Bukhara in order to check the Russian movements. Nevertheless, he won the governor general's consent to the continued presence of the whole Bengal division in Afghanistan, amounting to some 8,000 combat troops, with a much larger contingent of camp followers, support, and supply elements. This in spite of Auckland's stated assertion that the threat to India had been removed. In November 1839, Lord Auckland wrote, "The plans of aggression, by which the British Empire in India was dangerously threatened, have, under providence, been arrested. The Chiefs of Cabool [*sic*] and Candahar [*sic*], who had joined in hostile designs against us, have been deprived of power, and the territories which they ruled have been restored to the government of a friendly monarch."[1]

Reactions to the British invasion of Afghanistan and the occupation of the country have been described and interpreted differently. Many Western authors, including the British writers of the nineteenth century, link the failure of the British invasion more to errors made by leading British political and military officials than to the rejection of the foreign domination by the Afghans. But a closer look at the situation refutes the veracity of such interpretations. The British clearly made errors in planning and executing the invasion, but they were not the only reasons for their failure.

The Afghan resistance was not fueled by these mistakes but was stimulated by an innate devotion to their way of life, which was threatened by foreign invasion and occupation under the guise of supporting an Afghan prince.

The Occupation

During the first year of the occupation, the main question for the British authorities was what size force was necessary and how long it needed to remain in the country to ensure that the puppet king remained in power. The Simla Manifesto called for the return of the British forces once Shah Shuja was “firmly in place in his country.” After the installment of the shah in Kabul, however, there were a number of factors determining the size of the residual British military presence in Afghanistan. Although the Persians had retreated from Herat and there was no real threat of renewed hostility there, Russian incursions into Khiva and their threat to Bukhara by extension caused concern in the British decision-making circles. Further, the unenthusiastic reception of Shah Shuja by his subjects failed to live up to Lord Auckland’s expectation that the shah would be “speedily replaced on his throne by his own subjects and adherents.” This lack of support was seen as a need for the continued presence of a sizeable British force in Afghanistan. Fearing potential domestic and foreign threats to his power, Shah Shuja strongly discouraged the immediate withdrawal of British forces.

Accordingly, on October 9, 1839, the following disposition of the military forces under the command of Major General Willoughby Cotton was ordered:[2]

- In Kabul: Under command of Brigadier Dennie, the H. M.’s 13th Light Infantry, three guns of the 6th Light Field Battery, and the 35th Native Infantry Regiment.

- In Jalalabad: The 4th Brigade, 48th Native Infantry, 1st European Regiment, 37th Native Infantry, a detachment of sappers and miners, 2nd Native Cavalry Regiment, three guns of the 6th Light Field Battery, and a squadron of Skinner’s Horse.
- In Ghazni: 16th Native Infantry, a squadron of Skinner’s Horse, and a detachment of the shah’s contingent.
- In Kandahar: Under the command of Major General Nott, the 42nd and 43rd Native Infantry Regiments, 4th Company of 2nd Artillery Battalion, a squadron of the 4th Local Horse, and some of the shah’s contingent.
- In Girishk: One battalion, shah’s infantry.
- Qalat: 31st Native Infantry, shah’s artillery detachment.
- Quetta: One battalion, shah’s infantry and two guns.

To cover the northern passes of the Hindu Kush, a Gurkha infantry regiment from Shah Shuja’s army under Dr. Lord was dispatched and garrisoned in Bamian. Dr. Lord also established an outpost at Bajgah and occupied Saighan.

The rest of the Bengal army left Kabul and marched home in several columns over six days (October 11–16), using the eastern route to Peshawar and Punjab. Earlier, the Bombay army left on September 18, moving south through Ghazni to Quetta, taking a direct route through Abe-Estadah Lake, south of Muqur, to avoid Kandahar on the right. This cut the distance by 85 miles and avoided going through the treacherous Kozhak Pass. From Quetta, the Bombay army turned aside to storm Kalat in order to punish its ruler, Mehrab Khan, whose conduct during the passage of the Army of the Indus through his territory was considered less than friendly by his miserly provision of promised supplies to the half-starving British columns. The strong fortress of Kalat offered desperate resistance, but being betrayed by the

khan’s own close minister, the city fell. Mehrab Khan died with his sword in his hand. The victors added the regions of Shal, Mastung, and Cutch to the dominions of the nominal Afghan monarch, Shah Shuja, but these were under the actual control of the British authority.

As the Army of the Indus turned into the army of occupation, Afghanistan looked more like a garrisoned country than a governed land. The areas outside of the major towns were controlled by no one but their local chiefs. The fragile peace was punctuated by acts of violence throughout the occupied land. At the end of August 1839, Colonel Herring was murdered near Ghazni by the Ghilzai tribesmen while escorting treasure from Kandahar. A local chief, Sayed Hashim, rebelled in Kunar. The Ghilzais, the warlike tribes that inhabit wide tracts of the country from the Suleiman ranges westward, south of the main Kabul-Kandahar highway, and northward into the rugged country between Kabul and Jalalabad, never missed an opportunity to take the field against the occupiers. In the autumn of 1839, after the capture of Kabul, a British column under Captain Outram was dispatched to Zurmat, the home of Mehtar Musa, the leader of the earlier Ghilzai attack at Ghazni. His mission was to punish the recalcitrant tribes. Striking at the tribesmen in separate villages and forts, the punitive expedition destroyed many Ghilzai homes and their livelihood. The winter, which traditionally slows military action in Afghanistan, brought some calm. In May 1840, however, the rising of Ghilzais in Qalat forced General Nott in Kandahar to dispatch a mixed force of 1,200 men under Captain Anderson to the area. This resulted in bloody clashes with a force of 2,000 tribal horse and foot at Tazi, where the British guns and musketry repulsed two spirited dashes by the tribesmen, which they launched successively from the high ground on the left flank of the British column. Nott occupied the fortress of Qalat-i-Ghilzai with a detachment. This secured the communications between Kandahar and

Ghazni. Then the distribution of British gold completed the job by calming the tribes with payments of annual subsidies.

The Kohistan Uprising and the Return of Amir Dost Mohammad

The highlight of the first year of the occupation was the return of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan from Bukhara and his taking the field against the British occupation. Frustrated with the growing discontent of the Afghans and suspecting every strong native leader of intriguing with Amir Dost Mohammad Khan, Macnaghten put many Afghan chiefs, including Haji Dost Mohammad Khan of Garmsir, Agha Hussein, Mullah Rashid, Nayeb Amir, Mahmud Khan Bayat, and many others, in custody. He sent the leading religious figure Mir Ma'sum, known as Hafiz Ji, son of the late Mir Wa'iz, to India as a prisoner. These actions caused many Afghans to lose confidence in the British-installed king and forced them to collaborate with the rebels. Kohistan to the immediate north of Kabul became a hotbed of revolt. Many chiefs who had supported Shah Shuja in 1839 now found him a powerless puppet in the hands of the British. They joined the cause of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan and offered their support through his agents, who were active in the country.

In the summer of 1840, the amir of Bukhara permitted Amir Dost Mohammad Khan, who was virtually imprisoned there, to leave Bukhara but made arrangements to have the amir killed while crossing the Amu Darya River. Dost Mohammad discovered the plot and fled in disguise with a caravan. When the caravan reached Kholm in Afghanistan, he was welcomed by the *Wali* (governor). There he raised an army of 6,000 men among the ethnic Uzbeks and, in early September, he advanced on Bamian. Several companies of the Afghan regiment that garrisoned the posts at Bajgah (on the northern foothills of the Hindu Kush) and Saighan (some

40 miles north of Bamian) deserted to the amir. This forced the British-appointed commander Dr. Lord to abandon these forward positions.

The return of the amir alarmed the British, as it created uprisings in Kohistan and excitement all over the country. Proven reports showed that Nao Nehal Singh, the successor of Ranjit Singh and the ruling prince in Punjab, was in communication with Dost Mohammad. The British reacted on September 7, 1840, by dispatching Brigadier Dennie, with a native regiment, to Bamian to take command of the troops there. Bamian sits on the straight east-west road between Kabul and Herat through Hindu Kush valleys. Two well-trodden routes from the north across the Hindu Kush to Bamian pass through Bajgah in the northeast and Saighan in the north. Both key points are connected by the Kahmard Valley, which runs parallel to the Vale of Bamian.

On the evening of September 17 some advanced bodies of Dost Mohammad's cavalry were reported entering the Bamian Valley from the great defile six miles to the northwest on the Saighan route. On the following morning, the report of an attack on a village under British protection in the valley prompted Brigadier Dennie to move against the attackers and expel them. The British forces, including one Indian infantry regiment and most of the Shah's Gurkha regiment, 400 Afghan horse, and two guns, found themselves facing the main body of the amir. The entire front contained a chain of forts reaching to the mouth of the defile. Dost Mohammad massed his forces in groups around the forts and upon the hills on either side of the valley.[3] Artillery played the decisive role in the battle since the narrow defile was unsuitable for cavalry action. The battle was decided when the British guns came into play, discharging their shrapnel into the dense masses of men who had nothing with which to return fire. The withering fire into the compact units of Uzbek horsemen broke the ranks of these mounted fighters. After a desperate resistance, they

turned about and retreated through the valley. They were pursued up to Saighan, but the rugged terrain enabled the fugitives to move beyond the reach of the pursuers. Abandoned by his army, Amir Dost Mohammad was forced to retire. His situation worsened when the *Wali* of Kholm, his main backer, cowed by the British action, submitted to the British, promising to withdraw support from Dost Mohammad.

But this was not the end of the game for the fugitive amir. In a few weeks, he resurfaced in Kohistan to lead a popular anti-British uprising. Kohistan had become the stronghold of resistance and the spirit of revolt grew day by day. Among the main agitators was Dost Mohammad Khan's sister, the mother of Madad Khan.[4] The British authorities in Kabul decided to quell the growing upheaval. They dispatched Prince Timur with several hundred Afghan troops and Edward Conolly (acting as political officer) to Kohistan to appease the defiant chiefs. The prince was followed by a major task force commanded by Brigadier Sale. It consisted of one European and two Indian regiments. Brigadier Sale was to take charge of the operation and frustrate Dost Mohammad's efforts to prevail in Kohistan and threaten Kabul. He was accompanied by Alexander Burnes and Mohan Lal. The amir was elusive, moving between Nejrao and Parwan while looking for an opportune time and place to strike. Sale launched an extensive military campaign against the rebellious leaders, destroying their strongholds, punishing defiant chiefs, leveling rebel villages, and discouraging the local support of the amir. As Sale was leading combat actions, Burnes and Mohan Lal were busy with intrigues to buy off powerful chiefs and poison the minds of local leaders against one another in order to create suspicion and mistrust among the influential figures.[5] Once again, they used the services of Haji Khan Popalzai to further their conspiracies, including one against Mir Masjidi Khan of Julga.

From the end of September through the month of October 1840, the British forces destroyed the strongholds of several leading local chiefs but failed to get hold of the chiefs who had fled before their forts fell. On September 29, the fort (*qalla*) of Ali Khan in Tutumdarah was one of the first to be attacked by Sale. Ali Khan, a staunch supporter of Dost Mohammad, was in communication with him. He resisted vigorously from his strong position in the fort as well as from the surrounding heights and the suburbs. During the attack the British political officer Edward Conolly was killed by a musket ball as he was advancing on the fort. Faced with overwhelming enemy power, Ali Khan decided not to fight to the end but abandoned the fort, hoping to face the enemy on another opportunity. His fort was razed to the ground by the victors.

On October 3, Sale moved to Julga and laid siege to Mir Masjidi Khan's stronghold south of Charikar. Mir Masjidi, a celebrated national leader with religious (*Sahebzada*) credentials, commanded a large following. He was one of the leading figures of the anti-British revolt in Kohistan and Kabul and is featured prominently in the epic history of the war by Ghulami Kohistani.[6] He fought the enemy troops to a standstill after they failed to take the fort by storm. The walls of the *qalla* were too thick to be easily breached and too high to be easily scaled. "The British guns were light; the scaling ladders were short; and the enemy on the defenses numbered about 51 offered the most determined resistance."[7] The storming party consisted of one British light infantry regiment and detachments of Indian infantry led by Colonel Tronson, of the 13th Light Infantry. The storming party advanced to the attack but many of the leading men were shot dead in the breach. The struggle to mount the walls failed and the column eventually withdrew. At night, Mir Masjidi Khan, who was wounded, opened the gate of the fort and escaped to the Nejrao Valley, about 100 kilometers northeast of Kabul. There he became the soul of

the resistance and continued mobilizing the population against the British occupation.

On October 8, Sale's brigade marched to Charikar to confront Amir Dost Mohammad Khan, who was expected to enter the area. But the amir and his force had already passed through the area, heading to Nejrao before the British troops arrived. Nejrao, the mountainous hideaway in the Hindu Kush, became a staging area for anti-British operations in Kohistan—an area that straddles the modern Kapisa and Parwan provinces north of Kabul. Reports indicated that a growing number of supporters had flocked to Amir Dost Mohammad's standards, and rumors circulated that the amir intended to join the rebels of Kah-darah and Baba Qishqar, located about 20 miles north of Kabul, before attacking the capital. The situation caused desertion among the native troops, and on October 14, a whole company of Kohistani troops commanded by British officers defected to the amir. In order to block the potential march of the rebel army to Kabul, the British forces moved to Qarabagh, about 30 miles north of Kabul, and pitched camp on the main road to the capital.

There were two defiant chiefs in the neighborhood who refused to submit to the British troops. The fierce fighting that ensued between the British column and the Afghan chiefs at Baba Qishqar (now in the Deh-Sabz District of Kabul Province) and nearby Kah-darah alarmed Macnaghten, who wrote, "Burnes and Sale, with nearly 2,000 good infantry, are sitting down before a fortified position about twenty miles distant, and are afraid to attack it. The enemy made an attack upon them the night before last, killed and wounded some of our people, and got off unscathed. All this is very bad."[8]

Dost Mohammad was now in the Nejrao Valley at the head of a large crowd of *ghazis*. On October 27 the amir set off to face the enemy, moving to Durnama on the way toward the capital. Two days later, the British camp at Bagh-e-Alam

marched out to intercept him. It took two more days to locate the evasive amir. On November 1, while the force was encamped before Mir Masjidi's fort in Khwaja Khizri village (near Charikar), they ascertained that they were within the reach of the enemy. The next day, November 2, an ominous day in the annals of the English in Afghanistan commemorating the anti-British bloody uprising in Kabul in 1841, the British force at last came in sight of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan's army. It was positioned in the valley of Parwan, which stretches from the Hindu Kush in the north to the Ghorband River and Charikar to the south, centered in modern-day Jabal Seraj, about 50 miles north of Kabul. The town is located on high ground overlooking the lush plain of Parwan lying between the Nejrao Mountains and the fields of Gul-Bahar and Jabal Seraj. Although the Nejrao hills teemed with armed crowds, the amir did not seem prepared for combat that day. An unexpected movement precipitated the collision. On the first appearance of the British troops the amir evacuated the village of Jabal Seraj and the neighboring forts and was moving off to a position on some elevated ground commanded by a steep hill to his rear. Dr. Lord suggested that the British cavalry move forward to outflank the Afghan horse.

John William Kaye describes the day colorfully: "What followed is one of the most exciting, as it is one of the most melancholy incidents of the Afghan war," he wrote.

> It was a clear bright morning. The yellow foliage of autumn glittered like gold in the broad sunlight. The opposite hills were alive with the enemy. The crisp fresh air, so bracing and invigorating to the human frame, seemed to breathe confidence and courage. Dost Mahomed [Mohammad], who, since his defeat at Bamian, had been often heard of, but never seen, by the British troops, and who seemed to elude the grasp of the Army of Occupation like an *ignis fatuus*, was now actually within their reach. It ought to have been an hour of triumph. It was one of humiliation. The Afghans were on the hills skirting one side of the pass; the British troops were on the opposite declivity. Dost Mahomed saw our cavalry advancing, and from that moment cast behind him all thought of retreat. At the head of a small band of horsemen, strong, sturdy Afghans, but badly mounted, he prepared to meet his assailants. Beside him

> rode the bearer of the blue standard which marked his place in the battle. He pointed to it; reined in his horse; then snatching the white *lunghi* [turban] from his head, stood up in his stirrups uncovered before his followers, and called upon them, in the name of God and the Prophet, to drive the cursed *Kaffirs* from the country of the faithful. “Follow me,” he cried aloud, “or I am a lost man.” Slowly, but steadily, the Afghan horsemen advanced. The English officers, who led our cavalry to the attack, covered themselves with glory. The native troopers fled like sheep. Emboldened by the craven conduct of the British cavalry, the Afghan horsemen rode forward, driving their enemy before them, and charging right up to the position of the British, until almost within reach of our guns.[9]

The Afghans dominated the field for a while and then quietly withdrew from the scene of the battle. A contemporary writer in his epic poetry vividly describes this battle, saying that the fighting turned into “a melee with the native troops fleeing like a flock of sheep.”[10]

The British campaign in Kohistan, like everywhere else, was more than a purely military operation. It was significantly augmented by political, financial, and psychological elements aimed at winning local support, reducing the amir’s army’s popular backing, and creating mistrust and suspicion within the ranks of the Afghan resistance. Gold was often more effective than sabers and bayonets. Mohan Lal later wrote,

> Sir Alexander Burnes and myself were actively engaged in detaching from him [the amir] as much as we could the number of adherents. We sent our servants, natives of Kabul, with money into the different forts and villages; and by paying the people in small sums of money we deprived the Amir of gaining any additional number to his standard which he exhibited under the pretense of maintaining a religious war. The rumors of our distributing money amongst the people in order to prevent their junction with the Amir, had circulated amongst his followers, and he appeared distrustful of their fidelity, and feared that they might seize or destroy his power in the hope of receiving a reward from us.[11]

The persistent efforts of Amir Dost Mohammad for a comeback caused fears in Kabul. Macnaghten asked for reinforcements from India. He also considered preparing Kabul to withstand a lengthy siege and put a bounty of 200,000 rupees on Amir Dost Mohammad’s head. The

latter's victory in Parwan attracted more fighters to his standards. Sir Alexander Burnes, overcome by the disaster of the British cavalry in Parwan, wrote to Macnaghten that there was nothing left for the force but to fall back upon Kabul and urged the envoy to concentrate all troops in the capital. Mir Masjidi Khan appealed to the amir to come to Nejrao and lead the anti-British forces, which were gathering there. But the amir was fearful of being betrayed by British agents, who had infiltrated into the ranks of the resistance. According to one contemporary source, just before the Battle of Parwan, the amir narrowly escaped a trap set by a local chief, Abdul Sobhan Khan. The chief had hosted the amir in his fort and secretly sent his brother to Brigadier Sale to report the amir's location in the hope of winning the 200,000-rupee prize placed on the amir's head. But Dost Mohammad was alerted in time and fled with his small party into the mountains.[12]

Meanwhile, Amir Dost Mohammad, in the very hour of victory, felt that it was hopeless to contend against the power of the British government. Other Afghan sources claim that he intended to move to Zurmat and join the rebellious Ghilzai tribesmen of Ghazni. But as he was heading south with a small party, he changed his mind during a halt at Pay-i-Munar (just north of today's Kabul Airport). Since his family was in Ghazni under British protection, the amir decided to bow to his fate and submit himself to the protection of his enemies.[13] A day after his spectacular victory in Parwan, the wandering monarch, who was more than 24 hours in the saddle, unexpectedly appeared in Kabul and stumbled on the British envoy as he was returning from his evening ride near the Bala-Hissar fortress. Amir's attendant galloped forward to the envoy and reported to him that the amir was at hand. "What amir?" asked Macnaghten. "Dost Mohammad Khan" was the answer. Astonished by the response, he anxiously queried, "With or without army?" At this point the amir himself stood before him. Dismounting himself from his

horse, Dost Mohammad surrendered his sword to the envoy, but Macnaghten returned it to him with respect and asked the amir to remount. They then rode together into the mission compound. The gallant Afghan amir was treated with honor not only by the envoy but also by the British officers, who paid him all kind of attention. Macnaghten later wrote, “Shah Shuja had no claim upon us. We had no hand in depriving him of his kingdom, whereas we ejected the Dost, who never offended us, in support of our policy, of which he was the victim.”[14]

On November 12, 1840, Dost Mohammad Khan left Kabul under escort for India, where he was treated with courtesy and hospitality. He was joined by his family in Ludhiana and later he was transferred to Calcutta. His exile, however, did not last long, and about two years later he returned to regain his throne in Kabul after the retreat of the British from Afghanistan.

The surrender of Dost Mohammad Khan removed a formidable rival to the British-backed Shah Shuja. At this point, it would have made sense for the British force to leave Afghanistan. The deportation of the amir was followed by a period of peace. The situation presented another opportune moment for an honorable withdrawal of the British forces and to correct a perilous policy. Sir Macnaghten, however, decided otherwise. “The unexpected surrender of Dost Mohammad was a second test of the honesty and sincerity of the Indian Government in its trans-Indus operations,” wrote Durand.

> No more striking event could be conceived for an honourable termination to the armed occupation of Afghanistan, and for the triumphant return of the Anglo-Indian army to its own frontier. By furnishing so unhoped an occasion Providence removed all reasonable ground of excuse or hesitation, and afforded the Indian Government the very moment which it preferred to wait. But man, in his shortsighted elation, clung to ill-gotten conquests, and rejecting the proffered opportunity, was overtaken by a fearful and terrible retribution.[15]

In spite of the surrender of the amir and the failure of the Russian expedition to Khiva, which came on the heels of the amir's capitulation, the uneasy occupation persisted, and the withdrawal of the British army from the country continued to be a remote possibility. For one thing, Shah Shuja had failed to establish his authority over the nation and win the support of influential chiefs and the empathy of the general public.

The ensuing political environment in 1841, which turned out to be the last year of the British occupation, was shaped by three major trends:

- the outbreak of local rebellions across the country;
- the growing pains of the occupation;
- the change of mood in the British home country.

The year 1841 saw growing disaffection and simmering disturbances that swept across the nation from Helmand and Kandahar to Ghazni, Kapisa, and Nangrahar. The presence of the British became a perennial source of resentment, as it favored a few and excluded many who felt their legitimate influence and power were usurped by the invaders and their puppets. The most affected ones soon rose to express their dissatisfaction violently. The maladministration in the south and instigation by the Herat rulers fueled the disaffection of the Durrani and the Ghilzai tribes in the south. Shah Shuja's viceroy there was his heir apparent, Prince Timur, whose court was dominated by the men who had shared his years in Ludhiana.

One of the disaffected leaders was Akhtar Khan Alizai, who was shortchanged from getting the promised chiefdom of Zamindawar. He raised his clan in revolt, fielding some 1,200–1,500 horse west of the Helmand River. Although he was defeated on January 3, 1841, by a British force under Farrington, he never gave up the struggle and in alliance with other dissident Durrani chiefs kept the plains of Helmand turbulent and defiant throughout the year.

As the Durranis were mobilizing their tribesmen against the occupation of Helmand, the Ghilzai country in the west and around Ghazni became defiant and ready to strike. The Ghilzai uprising was triggered by an unprovoked attack by Major Lynch, the political officer, against a Ghilzai fort at Qalat-i-Ghilzai. The chief and 15 Ghilzai were killed during the attack. This precipitated a rising of the Ghilzais. In order to keep the tribesmen under control, the British decided to restore the dismantled fort of Qalat-i-Ghilzai and hold it as a military base between Kandahar and Kabul. This move was challenged by the tribesmen and caused General Nott in Kandahar to dispatch a mixed force under Colonel Wymer to crush the rebellion.

While the British detachments were winning tactical encounters, their small battlefield victories failed to destroy the revolting forces or break their will to resist. The single small victories over the tribesmen in the west as well as the punishing action in Zurmat created the false impression that the country had been pacified. In reality the Ghilzais and the Durranis were both up in arms against the authority of the shah and his supporters. Rawlinson, at Kandahar, saw clearly at this time the deterioration of the British position in the country and was continually warning the envoy of the dangers that loomed so largely before him. But misled by the delusion of peace and overwhelmed by his drive for grandeur, Macnaghten was unwilling to face the reality and denounced everything that was said about the unsettled state of the country. He thought that Major Pottinger, the political officer in Charikar, was an alarmist after he warned the envoy of possible troubles in the area. So on August 20, amid simmering troubles across the country, Macnaghten wrote with unjustifiable satisfaction that “the country is perfectly quiet from Dan to Beersheba.”[16]

But such optimism was not shared by the powers that be in the home country. As early as the end of 1840, the Secret Committee communicated to the governor general

requesting the reassessment of the situation. They argued that the failure of Shah Shuja to win the support and affection of his people could hardly justify the prohibitive exhaustion of the financial resources of India and the human costs of the occupation of Afghanistan. By the spring of 1841, debate arose over serious consideration whether or not the policy, which had proved so utterly disastrous, should be openly and boldly abandoned. Lord Auckland, however, was in favor of the continued occupation of the country, though it would cost one and a quarter million pounds a year, which was not readily available. The Indian budget faced a quarter-million-pound deficit. Neither raising taxes nor borrowing funds to cover the extra spending was politically popular.

At the end of August the Tories won the election in Britain and the new government of Sir Robert Peel was keen on cutting government expenditures. He saw the occupation of Afghanistan as a drain on the revenue of India. In addition to the one-and-a-quarter-million-pound cost of the Afghan adventure, maintaining a flotilla of steamships on the Indus exacted another million pounds. Lord Ellenborough, the new governor general of India who replaced Auckland, decided to Afghanize the conflict by doubling the size of Shah Shuja's contingent, drawing down the number of Indian troops and cutting financial subsidies to the Afghans. It is interesting to note that "Afghanization" became a catchword for the exit strategy during the Soviet occupation (1979–1989) and the US-led NATO war in Afghanistan (2001–2014).

One of the fateful consequences of economizing the occupation was the reduction of subsidies and stipends paid to the chiefs of Ghilzais, Kohistanis, Mohmands, and the Qizil-Bash. The decision caused resentment and the chiefs decided to tap into public opposition to the occupation and played the *Jihad* card to mobilize the latent anti-British sentiments among the conservative Afghan population. The affected eastern Ghilzai chiefs, who were paid to secure the

line of communication between Kabul and Jalalabad, became a driving force behind the movement. They left Kabul, occupied the passes on the road to Jalalabad, and raided the supply convoys.

The Seeds of the Rebellion

The occupation entailed a number of political, security, administrative, economic, and social considerations that fueled public resentment, leading to local rebellions and eventually general insurrection. Politically there was a tension between the sovereignty of the king and occupation of the country by the British forces. Shah Shuja was an independent ruler only in name, as the real power was exercised by the British envoy. In order to reconcile the conflict, Macnaghten let the nominal monarch administer certain functions, including the settlement, collection, and appropriation of revenue and the exercise of criminal justice, while he himself monopolized the authority over internal and external political affairs involving foreign relations and dealing with the Afghan tribes. He retained control over military affairs and the authority to send expeditions against revolting tribes and decided the size of the forces and the concept of operation.

The dual administration not only failed to ease the tension but often exacerbated the conflict. Complainants affected by the decisions of the shah sought interference by the British authorities, and those who felt they were treated unjustly by the *Farangis* appealed to the shah for remedy. The situation caused mutual mistrust, frustration, and even hostility. Shah Shuja's senior minister, Vizier Mullah Shukur, was disliked by the British functionaries for his anti-British sentiments and maladministration. He eventually turned into the most hostile Afghan official opposing the British authorities.

In terms of security, Macnaghten's decision to reshape a traditional system led to the creation of a dangerous vacuum. Traditionally Afghan kings ruled through winning the support of the chiefs, who maintained sway over the tribes and communities. The king could balance the power of the nobles by making separate deals with them, while the chiefs were hardly able to mobilize en masse against the monarch. The system was a peculiarity of Afghanistan's aristocracy. This was the way Amir Dost Mohammad handled the chiefs. There had been attempts in the past by strong rulers to offset the power of the tribal strongmen by building and maintaining nontribal professional military forces. Such a system worked only under powerful leaders and was often supplemented by tribal and local militia raised by their chiefs. The British envoy claimed to be there for a temporary occupation and yet he acted to reform the centuries-old security establishment. He raised militias and levies to balance off the influence of the chiefs. The creation of the *Khyberi, Janbaz, Jezailchis,* and *Kohistan* corps paid by the royal treasury and commanded by British officers failed to build a viable counterbalance to the chiefs. Nor did it improve the ability of the state to sway the mostly independent tribal lords. The change alienated the chiefs without winning the devotion of the paid militia to the king or to their British officers. There were two known ways for Shah Shuja and his British supporters to rule the country: Through the cooperation of the chiefs or by destroying their power by an alternative nontribal force. The latter was only possible with a permanent occupation of the country by a significantly large force, which was neither feasible nor acceptable for its high costs and the risks of facing a drawn-out war with the tribes.

As Shah Shuja established his new administration, all principal towns on the frontiers of Afghanistan were placed under the shah's officials while British political officers, representing the envoy, supervised the affairs and watched

the conduct of the Afghan functionaries. The British interfered in their decisions and operation. This interference, cautiously made in secret, was not fully effective, while it alienated the local authorities. In the words of Mohan Lal,

> the more we found the people quiet, the more steps we took in shaking off their confidence. We neither took the reins of government in our own hands, nor did we give them in full powers into the hands of the Shah Shuja-ul-Mulk. Inwardly or secretly we interfered in all transactions, contrary to the terms of our own engagement with the Shah; and outwardly we wore the mask of neutrality. In this manner we gave annoyance to the king upon the one hand, and disappointment to the people upon the other.[17]

Economically, the demand for grain and other commodities by the British forces raised the prices of goods, causing hardship and poverty to the common people.[18] The British Commissariat officers purchased grain from different parts of the country at a higher-than-usual price, driving it beyond the reach of the population in general. The market for cattle, meat, fodder, and other supplies experienced the same situation. This drove many poor to begging for bread.[19] Another example was the introduction of a system of reduced tariffs on imported goods by Alexander Burnes without the consent of the shah's administration. The shah's minister, Mullah Shukur, saw the decision simply as a way of encouraging the interests of British commerce and quietly authorized his agents to levy higher duties than those set by the British. The affected merchants complained to the English.

The social effects of the occupation were equally unwelcome by the conservative segments of the Afghan society. The presence of the British troops in major cities and their inevitable socializing with the population was seen by many as the corrupting influence of the foreign presence in the country. Meanwhile, the laxity of social life and excesses of the British officers (including seducing Afghan girls and unscrupulous womanizing by higher ranks) strongly offended the conservative Afghan society. The recently knighted

Alexander Burnes, who resided within the city among the population, was reportedly notorious for holding music parties and receiving Afghan female guests at his nocturnal blasts. Although Mohan Lal, who lived with Burnes, refuted such reports, contemporary Afghan and other sources confirm the *Ilchi*'s overindulgence.[20] Whatever the facts of the case, they were serious enough to create a strong perception among the population of Kabul about the lechery and lewd behavior of the British officers. There were real cases of inappropriate conduct by the occupiers recorded in contemporary sources. Several sources speak of instances of British soldiers assaulting Afghan women from the time of their arrival in Kandahar in April 1839. In one case, an English soldier forced the daughter of a local Kandahari noble into a *karez* (underground water system) and raped her. A strong protest by the family about the brutality was, however, calmed and rapidly whitewashed by Shah Shuja and his British handlers.[21]

In a more socially liberal Kabul,[22] real and perceived cases of women taken to the British camps were resented by the strictly conservative rural population. In one of the widely publicized incidents, a concubine of a leading Afghan tribal chief Abdullah Khan Achakzai fled to Alexander Burnes's house on the eve of the 1841 resurrection in Kabul. When the Khan's people went to fetch her, the *Ilchi* refused to acknowledge her presence.[23] The moral laxity emanating from the British way of life in Kabul encouraged prostitution to the extent that Shah Shuja warned Macnaghten about the serious consequences of the practice.[24] Quoting Pottinger, Kaye notes that the "hatred of foreign domination, fanaticism, the licentiousness of the troops, and especially the impunity with which women could be seduced and carried off in a country celebrated for the strictness of the late ruler on this point, and the extreme jealousy of the

natives" were reasons for the uprising in Kohistan and its support for the returning Amir Dost Mohammad in 1840.[25]

Another issue that caused public resentment was proselytization attempts by the British missionaries in conspicuous disregard of the conservative social norms of Afghan society. This involved the distribution of copies of the Bible in the Persian language, which contributed to turning the most tolerant Muslims of the country into radical anti-*Farangi* fanatics.[26] The social resentment was amplified by Christians marrying Kabuli Muslim women who were considered to be very attractive. The practice was seen as an encroachment on the people's religion. Islamic jurisprudence permits the marriage of a Muslim male to a Christian women, but it forbids Muslim women from marrying Christian men. In one notable case Captain Warburton of the Bengal artillery fell deeply in love with Shahjan Begum, a niece of the ex-Amir Dost Mohammad Khan. They were married. A son of the couple later became a senior British officer who served 18 years on the frontier and founded the Khyber Rifles. Colonel Sir Robert Warburton later wrote, "In November 1840, my father fell in love with and married a noble Afghan lady, a niece of the Amir Dost Muhammad, the witnesses to the marriage ceremony being Sir A. Burnes, Colonels Sturt and Jenkins. The marriage certificate containing their signatures, and which is in my possession now, is a curious document."[27] These developments resulted in an increasing dose of fanaticism, which manifested itself in the provinces by the assassination of the "infidels" and armed uprisings.

The Gathering Storm

British military operations in Zamindawar and the Ghilzai country in the summer of 1841 brought about a deceptive peace in the south. In the north, since April of the same year

when Major General Elphinstone assumed the command of the troops in Afghanistan, the country enjoyed a state of apparent tranquility, particularly in the area northeast of Ghazni, including Kabul, Kohistan, Jalalabad, and the neighboring districts.[28] Macnaghten's satisfaction was further supported since his services were recognized by his appointment to the prestigious post of government of the Bombay presidency and he was looking forward to an early departure.

But the illusive tranquility was more a calm before the storm than a stable improvement in the political situation. The fluctuation in the security situation, however, kept Macnaghten and his political sidekick Burnes swinging between high peaks of glee and deep valleys of gloom. The sudden explosion of violent unrest in November was far from being a spontaneous rising but was underpinned by a number of political, administrative, economic, and sociocultural consequences of the occupation.

The rising troubles in the Ghilzai country east of the capital were dismissed by the envoy as fleeting trouble. Meanwhile, Eldred Pottinger, who was acting as political officer in Kohistan, dashed down to Kabul to report an impending general uprising there and recommended that strong preventive measures be taken. Public hatred against the occupiers increasingly expressed itself by the murder of Europeans and camp followers who ventured out of their camps and began drifting into the main quarters of Kabul, including the relatively friendly Jawansher district with its four neighborhoods of Chendawal, Muradkhani, Bayat, and Sherwani.[29] The former two still exist in modern Kabul. In the north, Sardar Mohammad Akbar Khan, who had fled Bukhara, moved south from Kholm into Bamian and was fomenting rebellion among the Ghilzais, with whom he was related by marriage.

In early October, the Sale brigade, which had completed its tour of duty in Afghanistan, set off on its return journey to India amid the rising troubles in the eastern Ghilzai country between Kabul and Jalalabad. He was instructed to reopen the route closed by the defiant tribes. On October 9, the advance party of the column, under Colonel Monteath, marched toward the passes with his own 35th Native Infantry Regiment, augmented by some artillery and cavalry elements. The party came under a night attack during its first halt at Butkhak, causing considerable loss to the troops. Thirty-five *Sepoys* were killed and wounded.[30] The following day, Sale with another regiment (Her Majesty's 13th Infantry) joined the force and on October 13 entered the treacherous Khord-Kabul defile under Ghilzai fighters' harassing fire. Sale was wounded and handed command to Colonel Dennie. After a halt of a few days, the brigade, which was augmented by troops that had returned from the Zurmat expedition, resumed marching on October 22 and pushed on to the Tezin Valley with little opposition.

From there Sale led his columns further and reached the Jigdalak Valley with little opposition. However, between the British column and the low lands to the east lay the treacherous Jigdalak Pass, the last serious terrain obstacle to the column's safe withdrawal to Gandamak. This defile cuts into the rugged terrain and is dominated on both sides by the stretching crests of the Spin Ghar Mountain. The pass's three-mile-long ascent is steep and winding and was particularly difficult for the laden camels and artillery horses to negotiate. The main body of the brigade climbed the pass to the crest unmolested since they held the high ground on the flanks. However, once the main body reached the summit, it did not halt there and wait for the rear to close up. Instead, it hurried down the reverse slope, leaving the baggage detachments and the rearguard exposed to the fury of the tribesmen, who attacked from all sides. This forced the flanking security posts to vacate their positions and flee the

pass. During the ensuing clashes, 120 men fell. The wounded among them were abandoned to certain death. The brigade finally reached Gandamak on October 30. There it found a local formation of *Jezailchis*, under the command of a British officer named Burnes, that had failed to help the brigade's passage through the defile due to a lack of instructions.

During the halt in Gandamak, shocking rumors of violence in Kabul, including the murder of Alexander Burnes, reached the Sale camp across the passes. Soon afterward, the confirmation of the awful tidings from the capital arrived along with orders from General Elphinstone calling for the immediate return of the brigade to Kabul. Sale called a council of war, which produced divided views. Some urged further retreat to Jalalabad; others argued in favor of returning to Kabul. Still others supported a middle course of continuing to hold out in Gandamak. It was Forbes's judgment that "a daring general would have fought his way back to Kabul, that a prudent general would have maintained at Gandamak, and that the occupation of Jalalabad was the expedient of a weak general."[31] Sale decided to fall back on Jalalabad and hold it as a base of support for a future relief column. The retreat from Gandamak left the *Jezailchis* exposed to the Ghilzai attacks, forcing them to follow Sale's steps to Jalalabad. The brigade left Gandamak on November 11 and fought its way to Jalalabad, which it occupied on November 14.

In retrospect, Sale's refusal to return to Kabul as ordered or to stay put in Gandamak could have had a decisive impact on the fate of the ruinous retreat of the Kabul garrison along the same route three months later. "Had Sale maintained his position at, or near Gandamak," wrote Durand, "he might have influenced the fate of Elphinstone's army, and one of the disastrous retreats on record would have been spared to the British arms by the cooperation of his moveable column."[32] This view was shared by many contemporary observers, such as the British author Henry George Keene

(1825–1915), who wrote, “Nott and Sale were now addressed with orders to hasten to Kabul; but the former was prevented from compliance by valid causes, while the latter, taking the responsibility of disobeying, lost as fine an opportunity of doing signal service as ever a British commander threw away. It is the opinion of the best military critics that if he [Sale] had returned to Kabul, or if he had only remained encamped at Gandamak, he might have averted the impending disaster.”[33]

Insurrection in Kabul

On November 2, 1841, early in the morning Kabul was shaken by the news of a popular outbreak that targeted Alexander Burnes’s house inside the city. The shops throughout the winding streets of the capital were all closed when an increasing number of people surrounded the British *Ilchi*’s residence. Burnes attempted to calm the throng while addressing them from the window of his upper room. Unmoved by Burnes’s efforts, the excited crowd, some having ascended to the roofs of adjacent buildings, launched attacks on the British residence around 8:00 AM and killed Sir Alexander Burnes, his brother Lieutenant Burnes, and Captain William Breadroot. They were all cut to pieces, as were their guards. The mob then sacked Captain Johnson’s treasury, which was kept in the neighboring house. It contained some 17,000 pounds. Flames and smoke billowed from the attack scene and sounds of musket fire were heard throughout the city.[34]

The mob that surrounded Alexander Burnes’s house was initially a small crowd, which gradually swelled and spread to the whole city.[35] Mohan Lal, whose residence was separated by a few buildings from Burnes’s, related the story in detail.[36] He said that initially a small body of men

surrounded the house while Captain Johnson, in charge of the treasury in the adjacent house, said,

> the mob at the first outbreak did not exceed 100 men. They however speedily increased; the plunder of my treasury, my private property and that of Sir Alexander, and seeing that no steps were taken to save either the one or the other, nor even what was of more considerable value to us at that time, the life of Sir Alexander Burnes, was too great a temptation to the inhabitants of Kabul, and when 300 men would have been sufficient in the morning to have quelled the disturbance, 3000 would not have been adequate in the afternoon.[37]

According to Mohan Lal, Alexander Burnes earlier had turned down the offer of Shah Shuja's vizier, Osman Khan, to escort him to the safety of Bala-
Hissar. But later he sent a note to the envoy requesting assistance, which never came. Burnes's messages for talks with the principle leaders of the insurrection, including Abdullah Khan Achakzai, Aminullah Khan Logari, Sikandar Khan, and Abdul Salam Khan (who were on the scene), were rejected.[38] Instead, they ordered their men to ascend to the tops of the neighboring houses and to penetrate the garden attached to the residency and to open fire on the British compound. The rebels set fire to the house and the flames extended to the room where Sir Alexander and his brother were standing. Lieutenant Charles Burnes then came out into the garden and was cut to pieces. Seeing that Charles was slain and the fire had consumed the whole of the house, Alexander Burnes stepped out of the door into the garden, pleading with the mob to save his life, but in one minute he was cut to pieces by the furious mob.[39]

Many commentators claim that the uprising was a spontaneous event that later expanded to an enormous proportion. But given the events that led to the outbreak, the attack on Burnes's residence was the first act of a bloody drama that had simmered for over two years. Riding a wave of political, administrative, economic, and sociocultural resentment among the populace, influential tribal leaders

and political elite mobilized the people for a revolt that spread like a brush fire across the country and never subsided until after the complete withdrawal of the occupying army. The rising of November 2 was deliberately planned and Sir Alexander Burnes was warned by his intelligence the night before of the impending storm. He dismissed it as an "incredible report."[40] On the eve of the insurrection, Lady Sale noted the arrival of many horsemen in Kabul from Kohistan.[41]

The weakening of the British force with the departure of Sale brigade, the uprising of the Ghilzais, and growing disturbances in Kohistan created an opportune moment to initiate the insurrection planned by the resistance leaders. The two major figures at the forefront of the revolt were Abdullah Khan Achakzai and Mir Masjidi Khan of Kohistan. Both were staunch anti-British activists. British sources claim that Abdullah Khan had spread rumors that several of the chiefs would be arrested and sent in exile to London. He is said to have forged an order from Shah Shuja to "kill the infidels" in *Jihad* against the occupiers. A passage in a posthumous memorandum by the envoy, which was in Lady Macnaghten's possession, asserted that

> the immediate cause of the outbreak in the capital was a seditious letter addressed by Abdullah Khan to several chiefs of influence at Cabul [Kabul], stating that it was the design of the Envoy to seize and send them all to London! The principal rebels met on the previous night, and, relying on the inflammable feelings of the people of Cabul [Kabul], they pretended that the king had issued an order to put all infidels to death; having previously forged an order from him for our destruction, by the common process of washing out the contents of a genuine paper, with the exception of the seal, and substituting their own wicked inventions.[42]

Contemporary Afghan accounts, however, indicate that the threat of sending hostile Afghan leaders into exile was real and made by the envoy in a letter produced by Shah Shuja's vizier, Osman Khan Nizam-u-Dawlah, on behalf of the envoy calling for five Durrani chiefs, including Abdullah Khan Achakzai, Ghulam Ahmad Khan, Mohammad Atta Khan

Bamizai, Sardar Sekandar Khan, and Abdul Salam Khan Bamizai, to be banished to Peshawar after a three-day notice. He asked Shah Shuja for approval. The shah objected to the plan after the chiefs appealed to him to block the brutal design.[43] With Macnaghten's insistence, however, the shah eventually yielded. Consequently, it is certain that the chiefs had met before November 2 and planned the uprising, which opened a long period of violence across the occupied land.[44]

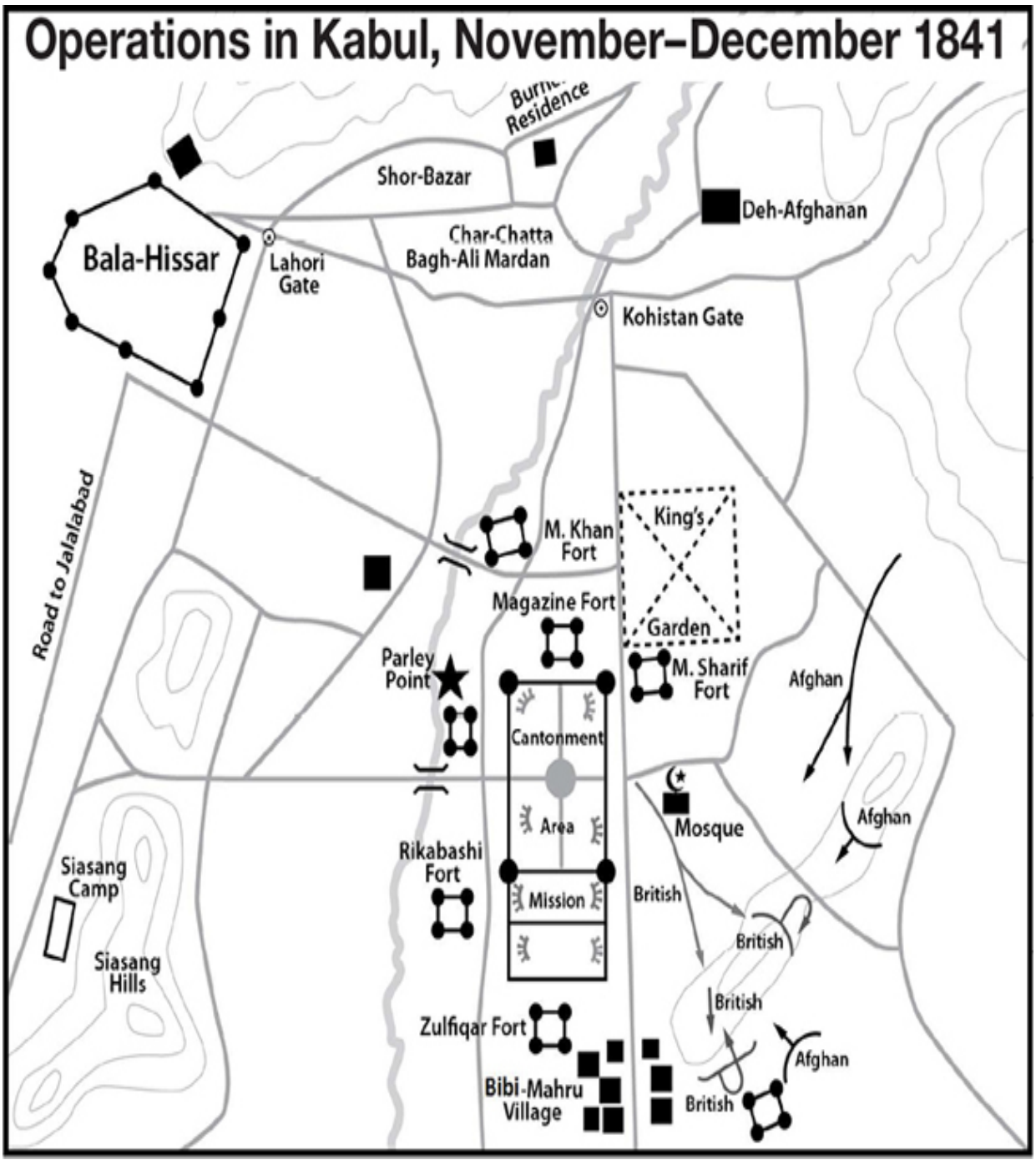
What made the Kabul uprising more damaging to British authority was its poor reaction to the crisis and its uncertain military leadership. The failure of the British authorities to take prompt action greatly encouraged the rapid spread of the insurrection. It took the British command quite a while to realize the gravity of the situation. Shah Shuja, on hearing of the disturbance, dispatched a regiment of his Hindustani troops under Campbell to the scene. The latter got stuck in the honeycomb of the narrow streets of Kabul as he moved directly into the heart of the town, instead of approaching the trouble spot using a circuitous route from the north or south. Meanwhile, Brigadier Shelton, who was then encamped at Sia-Sang, about a mile and a half distant from the cantonments, was ordered to march at once to the Bala-Hissar fortress with one company of European foot and a wing of native infantry, along with a regiment of Shah Shuja's contingent and six guns. The remainder of the troops of the Sia-Sang camp, the 44th Foot Regiment, two horse artillery guns, and some local irregular cavalry, were ordered into the cantonment. The 37th Native Infantry Regiment was recalled from Khord-Kabul without delay. The only combat action taken by Brigadier Shelton was to cover the withdrawal of the botched rescue attempt by Campbell, for the rioters, encouraged by inaction, increased rapidly in spirit and numbers and drove back the king's guard, inflicting a great slaughter. The king's guard managed to save the guns although it was difficult. The British took no

other decisive action to control the situation. Thousands of Afghans from Kohistan, Maiden, Wardak, and Logar descended on the city while British indecision prevailed.

At this time the British troops in Kabul were based in the cantonment north of the city and at the Sia-Sang camp east of Bala-Hissar fortress. The cantonment, with a space of 1,000 by 600 yards, was located on low ground along the Kohistan road outside the city walls. In modern times the area encompassed the grounds of the Afghan Army Officers Club and in recent years served as the headquarters of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and an annex to the US Embassy. The base was surrounded by forts that were neither occupied nor demolished to secure the cantonment. To the northwest, the Bibi-Mahru Hill dominated the area from where Afghan fighters targeted the British troops with incessant musket fire in November 1841. The cantonment's weak breastwork was easy to overcome and could be ridden over. Another disadvantage was that the supplies for the base were stored in a separate small fort situated at some distance outside the cantonment perimeter. There was an intervening fort and a walled garden not under British control. The base was dangerously separated from the Bala-Hissar fortress by the Kabul River. When the British army settled in Kabul, they assumed that the most secure base for the occupying force was the Bala-Hissar fortress, where they built some barracks, and part of the British troops had wintered there in 1840. The shah, however, objected to their continued occupation and Macnaghten yielded. The Bala-Hissar was evacuated and the troops were quartered in the cantonment built by General Cotton in a hardly defendable position on the plain north of the city.

At a time of growing disturbances across the country when the situation was imbued with uncertainties, the British army faced major command and control problems. There was a dangerous lack of conceptual and practical unanimity between the political and military officers, and the lack of

urgency displayed within the military echelons inhibited their ability for rapid and coordinated action and strategic consistency in dealing with the emerging situations. Macnaghten was reluctant to take much advice from successive British commanders in the country. Major General Elphinstone, a veteran of wars in Europe, including Waterloo, took over command in April 1841. He had little experience in Indian warfare and was in very poor health, suffering acutely from chronic rheumatic gout. At times, he failed to act timely and decisively. Brigadier Shelton, who arrived in early 1841 with a brigade from British India, came to relieve the force, which was withdrawing with General Cotton. He was a strong man, but acting as second in command to a weak general (Elphinstone) who allowed him no freedom of action. Being the principle tactical commander, Shelton was handicapped by his boss’s insistence on the prerogatives of his command with little decisive leadership.



Operations in Kabul, November–December 1841.

On the Afghan side, there was no structured military command and control system. The military establishment of Shah Shuja's administration, mostly officered by the British, was closely linked to the tactical command and support

network of the occupying forces. The Afghan resistance forces, challenging both the British and the Shah's authority, were led by tribal chiefs, community leaders, religious figures, and other influential personalities in a loose coalition of local forces operating in a decentralized way. The resistance fighters were mobilized from the local population and tribesmen by their traditional chiefs and fought under the command of their respected leaders. It was an informal structure whose military viability and sustenance were subject to the influence of its leaders, their support system, and the level of their ideological motivation (such as the fervor of *ghaza*, the love of freedom, and protecting the faith). The forces clustered around traditional leaders fought locally and would join fellow resistance hordes temporarily for decisive encounters when the enemy forces were vulnerable and all aspired to share the glory and rewards of impending victory. Due to their lack of a reliable logistical support system, the resistance forces' tactical maneuvers and battles were often short, but their strategic potential was enduring. They had the capacity to fight a war of "one thousand cuts."

During the intervening two months between the Kabul insurrection and the ruinous retreat of the British army from Kabul, two major challenges faced the Kabul garrison—one military and the other political—which eventually sealed its doom. Militarily, the increasing isolation of the cantonment and the difficulty of obtaining supplies were forcing the army to the brink of starvation. Politically the British were negotiating with the Afghan leaders from a weak position.

In order to strengthen the garrison in Kabul, the British command recalled Brigadier Sale to return from Gandamak, where he had encamped on his way to Jalalabad, and General Nott in Kandahar was ordered to dispatch a brigade to the capital. As mentioned earlier, Sale ignored the order and proceeded to Jalalabad, and the brigade sent from Kandahar under Brigadier MacLaren was forced to return

before reaching Ghazni because of heavy snowfall and inclement weather. In Kabul, the revolution gained momentum, drawing increasing crowds from outlying districts. The Afghans launched attacks on British outposts and installations throughout the area. Between November 3 and 9, the *ghazis* seized all forts and enclosures surrounding the cantonment. The commissariat fort (located in today's Ministry of Defense enclosure) contained an enormous amount of stores. It was abandoned by its British garrison under pressure by Afghan combatants who stormed the fort on November 5. An enormous amount of supplies fell into the hands of the attackers. This was a major blow to the half-starved cantonment. Meanwhile, Afghan leaders sent mullahs to villages to urge the merchants not to sell supplies to the *Farangis*. Between November 5 and 9, the forts and enclosures around the cantonment experienced a great deal of random fighting, keeping the area hot and under siege. A single victory by a detachment led by Major Griffiths failed to make a difference in the overall situation. On November 9, Brigadier Shelton with part of his troops was summoned from the Bala-Hissar fortress into the cantonment. At this point, the Afghans had occupied all the forts on the plain between the Sia-Sang heights and the cantonment, and from the nearest Rikabashi fort (just east of the cantonment near today's Microrayon area) showered the British base with heavy musket fire at close range. A British detachment stormed the fort, which had tactical success but did not change the operational situation.

The disturbance spread to the outlying areas around the capital. In the north, Charikar was garrisoned by Shah Shuja's Gurkha regiment. Eldred Pottinger was the political agent who was appointed in May 1841. Resentment in the area had grown since the summer and local chiefs, spearheaded by the renowned resistance leader Mir Masjidi, cut down Pottinger's assistant Lieutenant James Rattray at a parley and invested the Charikar cantonment and cut the

water supply to the post. The troops abandoned the post after desperate fighting and the garrison fell. Only Pottinger and Lieutenant John C. Haughton, both wounded, reached the cantonment in Kabul on November 15. In the west, the Sheikhabad post, which maintained communication between Ghazni and Kabul, was attacked by agitated locals, and the garrison was massacred.

The Kabul cantonment was exposed to constant enemy fire from the Bibi-Mahru Hill[45] rising over the village of the same name, which sat about a half mile from the camp at the northeastern slope of the ridge. “In fact,” wrote Eyre,

> we were so hemmed in on all sides, that, when the rebellion became general, the troops could not move out a dozen paces from either gate, without being exposed to the fire of some neighbouring hostile fort, garrisoned too by marksmen who seldom missed their aim. The country around us was likewise full of impediments to the movements of artillery and cavalry, being in many places flooded, and every where closely intersected by deep water-cuts. I cannot help adding . . . that almost all the calamities that befel our ill-starred force may be traced more or less to the defects of our position; and that our cantonment at Cabul [Kabul], whether we look to its situation or its construction, must ever be spoken of as a disgrace to our military skill and judgment.[46]

The intermittent fusillade from the Bibi-Mahru Hill targeting the cantonment became increasingly devastating. The Bibi-Mahru Hill is bisected by a gorge dividing it into the eastern and western ridges. On November 13, large hordes of Afghan foot and cavalry appeared on the western heights, where they had positioned two guns that were firing on the cantonment with remarkable precision. The British command ordered Brigadier Shelton at the head of a body of troops to sally forth and attack the enemy and capture their guns. The force ordered for the mission included three-plus cavalry squadrons, six infantry companies of a European regiment (Her Majesty’s 44th Infantry), five companies of the shah’s contingent, and two cannon. The force left the cantonment around 3 PM and headed to the gorge between the two hills bounding the plain, about a mile away. The Afghan horse

holding the left (western) side of the hill advanced in a separate column and pushed the British infantry down the slopes of the hill. Then the Afghans were driven back by artillery fire followed by a cavalry charge. Meanwhile, one of the abandoned Afghan guns was recovered and hauled to the cantonment. At the end of the day, the Afghan cavalry returned and resumed the assault at dusk when the British troops were “beating the retreat.” The renewed attack broke the ranks of the returning British column, turning it into a disorderly crowd pursued by the Afghans to the gates of the cantonment.

The Final Battle of Bibi-Mahru

The most serious combat action on the hills took place ten days later, on November 23, which marked a turning point in the war and decided the fate of the Kabul force. After the loss of the commissariat fort, the British forces were obtaining supplies from the Bibi-Mahru village. The villagers were constantly harassed by the Afghan insurgents for helping the *Farangis*. Then on November 22, the Afghans moved in force from Kohistan toward the Bibi-Mahru village, apparently with the intention of occupying the village. That was the day Sardar Akbar Khan had arrived in Kabul and thenceforth acted as the de facto leader of the resistance. After an inconclusive British action to occupy the village on November 22, the troops were recalled into the cantonment. In the words of Lady Sale, “the troops returned, having done nothing.”[47]

The envoy, at the recommendation of a council of war, ordered the immediate dispatch of a strong force to occupy the Bibi-Mahru village and dislodge the Kohistanis. A strong column of about half the available force, consisting of five companies of European and twelve companies of native infantry with two squadrons of cavalry and one gun,[48] was

ordered to move out under Brigadier Shelton to take the village by assault and hold the hill against incoming insurgents. This landmark combat on Tuesday, November 23, on the Bibi-Mahru Hill developed in three distinct phases. In the first phase, the British attempted to occupy the village. In the second phase the British force was drawn into a new combat on the western part of the ridge by a strong Afghan force approaching from the city. The final phase marked the complete rout of the British column as it fled to the cantonment with heavy losses.

The first phase began with the departure of the column to the hill overhanging the village since the principle mission was to seize control of Bibi-Mahru and dislodge its Kohistani occupants. Accordingly, at 2:00 AM the taskforce moved out of the Kohistan gate of the cantonment in complete silence on a moonless night to surprise the enemy. Reaching the transecting gorge, the force ascended the hill, struggling to drag the gun to the top. Once the troops were on the ridge, the entire force moved to the knoll at the northeastern edge of the heights, which dominated the Bibi-Mahru village. The gun was placed in position and engaged the Kohistanis' targets with grapeshot supplemented by musket fire in intervals of the cannonade. The Kohistanis responded with a discharge of *Jezail*s from the houses and towers and by the first light rushed to take up positions in a distant fort out of range of the British fire. The British troops missed the opportunity of storming the village when the surprised bombardment in the dark threw the defenders off balance. Both Afghan and British accounts indicate that there were no more than 40 fighters in the village in addition to the residents.[49] And yet the storming party, comprising two companies of native infantry with some Europeans under Major Swayne and Major Kershaw, failed in its attempt to enter the *qalla*, as Swayne missed the main entrance and tried to gain access through a wicket, which was barricaded. He failed to force it.[50] Consequently, the assault party

hurried to take cover in the face of galling fire. The Afghans' precise accuracy produced considerable casualties, including Major Swayne, who was shot through the neck. After a 30-minute combat engagement, the storming party was recalled by Brigadier Shelton.

Meanwhile, the British command detected large bodies of mounted men and infantry streaming out of the city and heading toward the hills overlooking the cantonment. Soon the western ridge of the Bibi-Mahru heights beyond the intersecting gorge and the plain below was teeming with feisty armed men and spirited *ghazis*, estimated at 10,000 men.[51] Faced with an impending attack from the west, Shelton covered Bibi-Mahru village by leaving three companies of the 37th Native Infantry under Major Kershaw on the knoll above the settlement and sending a cavalry squadron under Lieutenant Walker to the plain in the west to intercept enemy movements to and from the village. In order to counter the new waves of Afghan fighters, Brigadier Shelton moved his force along the eastern ridge to a position near the intersecting gap.

Thus the battle entered into a second phase. Shelton placed his single available gun near the gorge and deployed the infantry in two squares back to back 200 yards apart with the cavalry massed in the rear. Although exposed to withering fire from long-range *Jezail* muskets, the British infantry failed to build *sangars* (stone breastworks). Around 7:00 AM, the fire from the enemy's position on the hill became so galling that the few skirmishers sent to the brow of the hill overlooking the gorge could retain their positions.[52] The Afghan fighters were aiming at the British forward square with the long-range accurate fire of their *Jezails* across the dividing depression. The shorter-range muskets of the British troops could not match the long range of the Afghan *Jezails* and the frontline skirmishers could hardly endure the Afghan fire.[53] In the words of Kaye, "the

Afghan marksmen mowed down our men like grass." The forward infantry square suffered heavily. This situation continued until 10:00 AM when a large party of Afghan mounted fighters threatened the right flank of Shelton's forces. Lieutenant Walker's cavalry detachment on the right was recalled to avoid its annihilation. The move, however, enabled the Afghan horse to surround the British formations at all points, except its frontal line. The single gun of the British force kept the Afghans on the opposite hill under pressure for a while until it became dysfunctional due to incessant firing, which caused its vent (ignition) area to overheat.

As Shelton's men endured enemy long-range fire for hours to which they could not reply, a group of *ghazis* suddenly leaped out of the gorge and planted three standards close to each other, a red, a yellow, and a green one, about 30 yards from the enemy position. "Most conspicuous were Mackintosh, Laing, Troup, Mackenzie, and Layton who, to encourage the men, pelted the *ghazis* with stones as they climbed the hill."[54] Brigadier Shelton offered a reward of 100 rupees to any man who should take a flag of the enemy but all attempts to encourage the men were in vain. The waves of *ghazis* forced back the forward British line, wreaking havoc within its forward square.[55] In the words of Lady Sale, "our men would not advance, though this party did not appear to be 150 in number. . . . The enemy rushed on drove our men before them very like a flock of sheep with a wolf at their heels. They captured our gun."[56]

The British infantry was panicked and remained listless, failing to respond to their officers' command to move forward. Nor did they heed the familiar trumpet call to charge. Shelton's calls to charge failed to bring a single bayonet down; instead, panic spread among them, and they broke ranks and fled. "The unexpected attack," wrote Kaye,

“seems to have struck a panic into the heart of our troops who turned and fled along the ridge like sheep.”[57]

Down on the plain the Afghans faced a calamity of their own. One of their prominent leaders and the driving force behind the resistance, Abdullah Khan Achakzai, was seriously wounded and carried off from the battlefield. The news caused the assailants to slow down their action and temporarily fall back. During the ensuing lull, the British troops reoccupied their earlier positions on the brow of the hill over the gorge and their cooled-down gun came into play again. The cantonment was about to celebrate a seeming victory of its troops, but the opportunity to pursue the enemy was lost by the inaction of the British cavalry and the failure of the British command to augment the fighting column from the cantonment. Meanwhile, between 10:00 AM and 11:00 AM, large bodies of Afghan infantry advanced from the Bagh-e Shahi (part of Presidential Palace compound today) across the plain to the eastern edge of the hill. They intended to cut off the supply of the ammunition to the battlefield and block the evacuation of the wounded. The move was, however, checked by a party of troops and some 50 *Jezailchis* under Captain Trevor.

Around noon the situation changed when reinforced Afghan hordes swarmed over the hill and resumed their long-range fire with destructive effect, which killed most of the British artillery gunners. With this, the battle entered its third and final phase, which was extremely ruinous to the British. Brigadier Shelton decided to fall back to a new position. This withdrawal emboldened the Afghans, and they intensified their pressure and continued their attacks, forcing their enemy to give way. A larger body of fighters spearheaded by devoted *ghazis* suddenly emerged from the gorge and fell on the wavering British lines. Brigadier Shelton called on Major Kershaw to move his reserve from the knoll overlooking Bibi-Mahru village but his troops were hard-pressed all day by

large bodies of Afghans who had poured into the place during the morning. Before Brigadier Shelton was able to reposition the reserve, the *ghazis* charged and completely broke the squares. All British order was lost. The British infantry and cavalry ran away down the slope of the hill, heading toward the cantonment. The Afghan accounts indicate that some elements of the enemy forces fought gallantly but they were overwhelmed. Seizing the opportunity, the Afghan horse swooped down on the retreating enemy and turned the battlefield into a melee with friend and foe mixed up in bloody confusion. This ended with the complete rout of the British force in spite of the heavy volleys of cannon fire from the cantonment to cover the retreat of its troops.

The cantonment survived only because a leading Afghan chief, Sardar Osman Khan, ordered his men to stop at the gates of the camp and prevented them from pursuing the fugitives further. Lady Sale says,

> Osman Khan was heard by our *Sepoys* to order his men not to fire on those who ran, but to spare them. A chief, probably the same, rode round Kershaw three times when he was compelled to run with his men; he waved his sword over his head, but never attempted to kill him; and Captain Trevor says his life was several times in the power of the enemy, but he was also spared.[58]

According to Eyre, Osman Khan's move "may be reckoned, indeed, the chief reason why all of our people, who on that day went forth to battle, were not destroyed." The next day the Afghan chief wrote to Macnaghten that, if his troops had followed up their successes, the loss of the cantonment and the destruction of the British force were inevitable, but he declared that the chiefs only desired that "we should quietly evacuate the country, leaving them to govern it according to their own rules, and with a king of their own choosing."[59] Some authors have mistaken Osman Khan with his namesake Osman Khan Nizam-u-Dawlah,[60] the vizier of Shah Shuja. The former was a Barakzai and a nephew of Dost Mohammad and the latter a Sadozai related to the shah.

The British forces suffered heavy losses amounting up to over 300 killed and wounded. The three companies of the 37th Native Infantry under Major Kershaw, which were among the last to leave the hill, suffered severely. The grenadier company was totally wiped out except three men. The 44th had 58 wounded, the 37th had 80 killed and 10 wounded. Among the officers, Lieutenant Colonel Oliver, Captain Mackintosh, Lieutenant Long, and Lieutenant Walker were killed and half a dozen others wounded. The retreat was so swift that the bulk of the wounded, including Lieutenant Colonel Oliver, were left in the field, where they were brutally cut to pieces.[61]

The Battle of Bibi-Mahru is remembered as one of the most significant and disastrous events in the annals of the first Anglo-Afghan war and one of the most decisive and disgraceful tactical defeats of the British forces.[62] It marked a turning point in the war. The way the battle was fought has been widely criticized by professional soldiers and others. Lieutenant Eyre, who participated in the battle, offers a long list of errors made during the battle: taking only one cannon to the battlefield with no backup when it overheated; the failure to storm the Bibi-Mahru village after it was surprised in the early morning; the failure of the sappers to set up a stone breastwork on the hill; presenting a solid mass by deploying the infantry in square formations against accurate enemy fire; the failure to deploy the cavalry on the plain, making it less effective due to its concentration on the hill; and the failure of Brigadier Shelton to make a timely decision for orderly retreat from an untenable situation.

Eyre opined that the use of the infantry square formation, which had worked elsewhere, was not a suitable tactic at Bibi-Mahru. He wrote,

> All have heard of the British squares at Waterloo, which defied the repeated desperate onsets of Napoleon’s choicest cavalry. At Bey-maroo [Bibi-Mahru] we formed squares to resist the distant fire of infantry, thus presenting a solid mass against the aim of perhaps the best marksmen in the world, the

said squares being securely perched on the summit of a steep and narrow ridge, up which no cavalry could charge with effect. A Peninsular General would consider this to be a novel fashion; yet Brigadier Shelton had the benefit of the Peninsular experience in his younger days, and, it must be owned, was never surpassed in dauntless bravery.[63]

Political Negotiation

Political negotiation with the Afghan leaders for a favorable deal to ensure a secure withdrawal of the British forces was getting tougher as the military situation worsened and the Afghan chiefs became increasingly suspicious of the British intentions and thus acted more assertively.

The military defeat of November 23 forced the British authorities to consider a serious political solution to the difficult situation faced by their forces in Afghanistan. The progress of agreeing to terms with the Afghan resistance leaders, however, was inhibited by mutual suspicions and a common failure to stick to commitments. The Afghan chiefs were interested in seeing the British forces leave Afghanistan, especially from all its occupied cities, including Kandahar, Ghazni, Kabul, and Jalalabad. Sardar Mohammad Akbar Khan and the other Barakzai leaders were also keen on the secure return of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan and his family from their Indian exile. The rule of Shah Shuja was not a serious issue for the Afghan chiefs since they were convinced that they could deal with the shah one way or the other once his backers left. On the British side, the military's main concern was guarantees for the provision of adequate supplies and a safe withdrawal to Jalalabad. Politically, however, the envoy was interested in shaping the political situation so that it was suitable for making the best possible deals with the Afghan leaders. Just leaving the country under unfavorable conditions was not an option. He had hopes for continued occupation through military action or political deals with certain tribes and political forces.

As the British position was becoming more and more precarious, Sir William Macnaghten did not seem to be pursuing a distinct policy but just trying to keep his options open. He was engaged in separate talks with the Barakzai chiefs, the Ghilzai tribal heads, and the Qizil-Bash community leaders and spending an enormous amount of money to win support. Aware of the desperate situation that the British were faced with, no single segment of the Afghan political spectrum was willing or able to deliver what the envoy was looking for. They, however, were interested in the British gold and tended to make empty promises in order to partake of the open purse of a distressed *Farangi Ilchi*. Macnaghten's policy entailed dangerous machinations and intrigues with the object of sowing discord among the Afghan chiefs and thus weakening the league of hostility against Shah Shuja and his British supporters—a policy that eventually caused suspicion and mistrust among the Afghans and sealed the envoy's doom and the fate of the British forces.

On the dark side of the conflict, the envoy was assisted by the spymaster Munshi Mohan Lal, who had spread a wide net of intrigue, including assassination plots to take out the most ardent anti-British leaders. The munshi was supposedly responsible for the death of two leading Afghan chiefs, Abdullah Khan Achakzai and Mir Masjidi Khan Kohistani. The two chiefs died under suspicious circumstances allegedly arranged by assassins hired by the munshi. On November 23, Abdullah Khan Achakzai was fatally wounded, most likely by an assassin's bullet, and was taken from the battlefield during the action at the Battle of Bibi-Mahru. He died within a few days. At the same time Mir Masjidi Khan mysteriously disappeared from the battlefield, where he was playing a prominent part. It is certain that Lieutenant John Conolly, Macnaghten's cousin and his confidential representative to Shah Shuja, authorized Mohan Lal to eliminate prominent Afghan leaders. "I promise 10,000 rupees, for the head of

each rebel chief," wrote Conolly. On November 11, he wrote, "There is a man called Haji Ali, who might be induced by a bribe to try and bring in the heads of one or two *Mufsids*. Endeavor to let him know 10,000 rupees will be given for each head, or even 15,000 rupees."[64] Soon after this Abdullah Khan and Mir Masjidi Khan died mysteriously, and in each case the blood money was claimed.

Kaye states that one Abdul Aziz claimed that he was instructed to target Abdullah Khan and declared that he shot down his victim from behind a wall. Another person named Mohammad-ullah swore that he had suffocated Mir Masjidi Khan in his sleep. Although Macnaghten denied that he had approved the assassinations,[65] Durand holds that it was the belief of the Afghan chiefs that the British envoy had set a price on their heads, a suspicion that led to the assassination of Macnaghten after their suspicion was confirmed.[66] The Afghan accounts suggest that the chiefs were convinced that the envoy had targeted each of them for assassination and decided to seize him during their final parley with him.[67]

The negotiation position of the British authorities weakened after the defeat of the British troops at the Battle of Bibi-Mahru. Emboldened by their military achievement, the Afghan chiefs raised their price for making political deals with the British authorities. The first overtures for negotiation came in a letter from Osman Khan, a relative of Nawab Zaman Khan, who had been proclaimed king by the insurgents. When the Afghan deputation met with Macnaghten on November 25, just two days after the battle, the opening position of the Afghans was tough. They demanded that Shah Shuja and his household be handed over, Brigadier Sale evacuate Jalalabad and march to Peshawar, and the British garrison in Kabul deliver all its arms and ammunition and surrender all European officers and their families as hostages to its full withdrawal. After meeting these conditions, the Afghan chiefs pledged to allow

the British army to depart for India. Finding the conditions too humiliating, the envoy rejected the terms, and the talks broke up.

The British military contemplated two options without reaching a consensus. The first was to move to Bala-Hissar, which provided better protection until spring, a move suggested and supported by Shah Shuja. The second choice, supported by Brigadier Shelton, was to march east and fight their way to Jalalabad. Both were risky choices, and the former was ruled out after the bridge over the Kabul River, which separated the cantonment from Bala-Hissar, was blown up by the Afghans on December 5. The back-and-forth exchange continued for days until the envoy, under pressure from the military, drew up a peace plan and presented it at a meeting with the Afghan chiefs on December 11. The meeting was attended on the Afghan side by Barakzai chiefs, including Mohammad Akbar Khan, Osman Khan, Mohammad Khan Nayeb Amir (commonly called Nayeb Amir), and Ghilzai leaders, including Mohammad Shah Khan Babakar-khel, Hamza Khan, and Khuda-Baksh Khan. The Qizil-Bash were represented by Khan Shirin Khan. The Macnaghten plan called for the withdrawal of the British army to India once needed supplies and transport were delivered by the Afghans and the security of the withdrawing column was provided. The treaty also stipulated that Amir Dost Mohammad would be allowed to return to his own people once the British left. Both sides agreed to the terms, and the evacuation was set to begin on December 15, but it was delayed on the grounds that the supplies were not provided in time and that the Ghilzais had not promised a safe march by the army through the mountain passes.

Time was not on the British side as the weather worsened with the passage of each day. The supplies that trickled into the cantonment were far less than the minimum requirement, pushing the force to the verge of starvation. On December 13, the British troops were evacuated, under

Afghan escort, from the Bala-Hissar fortress to the cantonment. They brought along some grain for their starving comrades. The Afghan demands for handing over the forts around the cantonment and the stores of arms and ammunition were met. The treaty called for Shah Shuja to leave for India, and soon after his acceptance the Afghan chiefs offered to let him stay on the throne, provided he gave his daughters in marriage to the leaders of the resistance. The shah initially consented, but a few days later he withdrew his acceptance. The chiefs became more suspicious and called for the immediate evacuation of the cantonment, refusing to provide supplies until the troops started their departure. To make things even worse, a heavy snowfall on December 18 laid a five-inch-thick cover on the city, which stayed on the ground beyond the departure of the army in early January. On the following day, the envoy instructed the 27th Native Infantry Regiment that garrisoned Ghazni to march through the Zurmat Valley to India via Dera Ismail Khan.

On December 21, Macnaghten and the Afghan chiefs, Akbar Khan and Osman Khan, reached an agreement to place four British officers, including Captains Conolly and Airey, as hostages in the hands of the Afghans. Their demand for the inclusion of Brigadier Shelton in the group was rejected. The departure date for the Kabul garrison was set on December 22. On the same day, the envoy sent his carriage as a present to Sardar Akbar Khan. Meanwhile, the envoy still hoped to improve the situation by dividing the Afghan leaders. He continued to employ Mohan Lal to carry out the dark enterprise of the assassination of key, virulently hostile Afghan chiefs. Although Macnaghten now had a treaty with the Barakzai chiefs, he was offering large sums of money to Ghilzai and Qizil-Bash leaders to win them over to support Shah Shuja and his British allies. In the meantime, he conducted separate talks with Nawab Zaman Khan, Sardar Osman Khan, and Nayeb Amanullah Khan Logari

without informing each about the talks with the other chiefs.[68] On December 20 he wrote to Mohan Lal,

> In conversing with anybody, you must say distinctly that I am ready to stand by my engagement with the Barukzyes [Barakzais] and other chiefs associated with them; but that if any portion of the Afghans wish our troops to remain in the country, I shall think myself at liberty to break the engagement which I have made to go away, which engagement was made believing it to be in accordance with the wishes of the Afghan nation. If the Ghilzyes [Ghilzais] and Kuzzilbashes [Qizil-Bash] wish us to stay, let them declare so openly in the course of to-morrow, and we will side with them. The best proof of their wish for us to stay is to send us a large quantity of grain this night-100 or 200 *kharwar* [equal to 56 to 112 tons]. If they do this, and make their *salaam* to the Shah early tomorrow, giving his Majesty to understand that we are along with them, I will write to the Barakzyes and tell them my agreement is at an end.[69]

The dangerous game the envoy was playing brought grave consequences. Once the Afghan chiefs became aware of Macnaghten's tricky maneuvering, they set a trap for him into which he easily fell. Akbar Khan convinced the other chiefs that the envoy's intrigues to pit the Afghan chiefs against one another would undermine the momentum that they had achieved. In order to prove the unfaithfulness of the envoy, he devised a plan of deception, with the understanding of the other chiefs, to test British sincerity. On December 22, Sardar Akbar Khan sent Macnaghten an unbelievably generous draft treaty, which, though it sounded too good to be true, was willingly received by the envoy. The new proposed terms provided for Shah Shuja to remain on the throne with Akbar Khan serving as his vizier. They also allowed the British forces to stay in the Bala-Hissar with adequate supplies for another eight months and then withdraw at their own will in order to save face. In return, Akbar Khan demanded that three million rupees be paid to him by the British government plus an annual subsidy of 400,000 rupees. As proof of his good will, he offered to arrest Aminullah Khan Logari, one of the leaders who began the revolution and hand him over to him. Tempted by the

attractive proposition, the envoy signed off on the deal and agreed to meet Akbar Khan the following day.

The plan was to test the envoy's sincerity and he failed. Sir Macnaghten was warned by more than one of his close aides that the Afghan plan was a plot and advised him against stepping into what they suspected to be a treacherous trap. The envoy may have sensed the risk, but he still intended to take it since he was running out of options. "Dangerous it is," he said, "but if it succeeds, it is worth all risks: the rebels have not fulfilled even one article of the treaty, and I have no confidence in them; and if by it we can only save our honour, all be well. At any rate I would rather suffer a hundred deaths, than live the last six weeks over again."[70]

On December 23, around noon, Sir William Macnaghten, attended by Captains Lawrence, Trevor, and Makenzie, set out to meet Akbar Khan and his associated Afghan chiefs. The envoy's party left by the eastern gate of the cantonment and moved to the rendezvous point, which was located on the plain near the Kabul River between the Mahmud Khan fort (located at today's bridge of the same name outside the Ministry of Defense compound) and
the bridge over the river east of the cantonment (near the current Microrayon bridge). This was about 400 yards from the eastern wall of the cantonment. The location has now been fully developed into a residential and commercial area. As the parties were still mounted, Macnaghten presented a horse he had purchased for 3,000 rupees the day before as a sign of good will to Akbar Khan, who accepted it with appreciation, and he also thanked Sir William for the pistol he had sent to him the day before. Then they all dismounted and moved to the reverse slope of a hillock, out of sight of the cantonment, where a carpet was spread for the parley. The presence of the large crowd of Afghans at the spot, including the brother of Aminullah Khan Logari, raised the suspicions of the British party. In response to an inquiry, Akbar Khan said they were all "in the secret." The

conferences began as Akbar Khan, Sultan Jan, and Mohammad Shah Khan Ghilzai were sitting face to face with the envoy and his three attending captains, while other Afghan chiefs, Dost Mohammad Khan, Ghulam Muhayddin Khan, and Khuda Bakhsh Khan Ghilzai, were standing behind Akbar Khan. The envoy's small security detail of ten troopers was halted about 20 yards away.

The conference started calmly but soon turned into a raucous exchange, with Akbar Khan reproaching the envoy while accusing him of sowing dissention among the Afghans and ignoring commitments he had made. After the meeting continued for 15 minutes, Mohammad Shah Khan hinted in Pashto to Akbar that they were running out of time, and the Afghan chief suddenly ordered his supporters to seize the envoy and his companions.[71] The envoy struggled with Akbar Khan and Sultan Jan, who were trying to take him alive to the city and hold him hostage. But as the envoy refused to mount a horse, he was dragged down from the hillock and shot by Mohammed Akbar Khan with the very same pistol that the envoy had given to him the day before. Mohammed Shah Khan Ghilzai and Ghulam Muhayddin Khan saved Captains Lawrence and Mackenzie, whisking them away on their own horses into the Mahmud Khan fort; but Captain Trevor, who was seated behind Dost Mohammad Khan, brother of Mohammad Shah Khan Ghilzai, fell to the ground, and was instantly cut to pieces by the agitated *ghazis*.

Captain Mackenzie, who was present at the conference, later wrote,

> After the usual salutations Mohammad Akbar commenced business, by asking the Envoy if he was perfectly ready to carry into effect the proposition of the preceding night? The Envoy replied, "why not?" Then after a while as the Captain was in conversation with one of the Afghans he suddenly heard Akbar Khan shouting "*begeer! begeer!*" (Seize! seize!), and turning round, I saw him grasp the Envoy's left hand with an expression in his face of the most diabolical ferocity. I think it was Sultan Jan who laid hold of the Envoy's right hand. They dragged him in a stooping posture down the hillock, the only

words I heard poor Sir William utter being, "*Az barae Khooda*" [for God's sake]! I saw his face however, and it was full of horror and astonishment.[72]

Captain Lawrence offered a similar account.[73] Macnaghten's head was severed from his body and was taken to the house of Nawab Zaman Khan, the nominal king of the rebels. His body was dragged away and was hung up in the bazaar for public display. [74]

The assassination of the envoy marked the beginning of the end for the beleaguered British army in Kabul. Major Pottinger, who took over the negotiations as the senior political officer, was fighting an uphill battle to extricate his forces with safety and honor from the impasse. But the odds were against him. On Christmas Eve, the Afghan chiefs communicated the draft of a revised treaty to the British camp. Even though the chiefs condemned the deceitful conduct of the late envoy, they expressed regrets over his brutal murder. New demands were made that included the payment of the sums previously promised by the envoy to the chiefs for services in support of his deals, the surrender of four more hostages to join the two already in the Afghans' hands, and the surrender of all artillery pieces except for six guns. There was a heated British meeting on Christmas Day that debated how to respond to these arrogant demands. Taking a hawkish stance, Pottinger saw compliance with the degrading terms as humiliating and a fatal error. Citing messages from Jalalabad and Peshawar indicating that reinforcements were on the way from India, he suggested occupying Bala-Hissar and toughing out the situation or fighting their way through the passes to Jalalabad without taking encumbering baggage. He was, however, overruled as the others, including General Elphinstone, unanimously declared that, under the circumstances, meeting the demands of the Afghans was the best possible option.

During the coming days, Pottinger complied with all the terms except surrendering four married hostages along with

their wives and children. The sick and wounded who were unfit for travel were sent into the city in the company of two surgeons as agreed in the treaty. The treaty was ratified by the chiefs and sent to the cantonment on New Year's Day 1842. It provided for the departure of the British forces under the protection of tribal chiefs and an Afghan escort one day after they received their transport. At the same time, the Jalalabad garrison was to move back to Peshawar while the Ghazni garrison would be escorted to Peshawar. The British troops, families, and camp followers in Kandahar were to evacuate the area and march to India under the protection of the Afghans. As preparations for the departure were underway, hosts of *ghazis* and prospective looters loitered in the area around the cantonment, causing occasional clashes and drawing *Jezail* fire.

The British authorities were skeptical about the pledges made by the chiefs to furnish provisions and to protect the column during the march over the passes. Soon their concerns proved to be justified. Given the uncertainties, the severe weather, the supply problems, and the march of a half-starved army encumbered by large numbers of camp followers through the snow-covered and treacherous defiles, their future looked bleak. The Afghan leaders were not likely to accept the link-up of the Elphinstone army with the Sale brigade in Jalalabad in a combat-capable condition. The Afghan leaders feared that the combined force augmented with new reinforcements could reinvade Kabul after the winter. In this case, the British garrisons in western Afghanistan would have no reason to evacuate. (The British designation of Kandahar is actually in southern Afghanistan.) Therefore, Akbar Khan wanted Brigadier Sale to retire with his troops to Peshawar before the Kabul army reached Jalalabad. Otherwise he was bent on delaying and even destroying the Kabul garrison in order to prevent its link-up with the Jalalabad brigade. This explains the failure of the chiefs to keep their promises to supply provisions or prevent

the tribesmen from attacking the retreating British column. A simple, hardheaded military calculation underpinned the behavior of the Afghans. Treachery it was, but in the words of Forbes, “When historians write of Afghan treachery and guile, it seems to have escaped their perception that Afghan treachery was but a phase of Afghan patriotism, of an unscrupulous character, doubtless, according to our notions, but nevertheless practical in its methods, and not wholly unsuccessful in its result.”[75] On the British side, the army could have done better if it were commanded by a hawkish leader like Pottinger rather than the weak and infirm Elphinstone. Had the army decided to occupy Bala-Hissar and tough it out until the spring, it would have had far better chances of survival and more choices afterward.

The Retreat

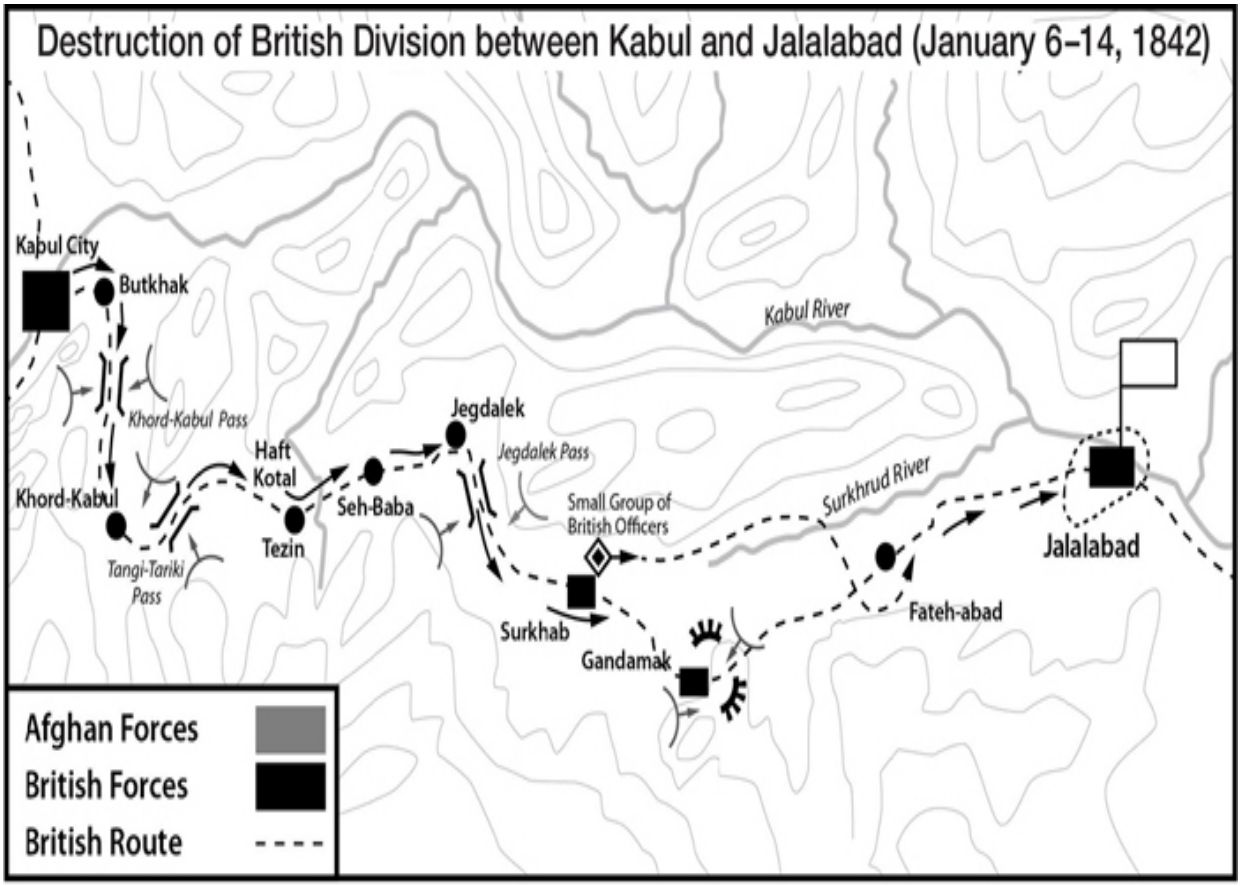
The march of the British army from Kabul to Jalalabad was an agonizing trudge to destruction. The story of the misery, starvation, cold, desertion, exhaustion, and death that befell the ill-fated column is told and retold in minute detail. The experience features a number of calamitous events: attacks at the most dangerous passes while the column was most vulnerable; the wild panicked rush of the large masses of camp followers that prevented the combat units from responding effectively to attacks; the slow pace of march (average of seven miles daily from Kabul to Gandamak) that exposed the column for a longer time to the tribesmen’s attacks; inadequate firepower and limited artillery support; and a lack of food, firewood, and tents at the bivouac areas.

The column consisted of 690 Europeans, 2,840 Native troops, 970 native horse, and six guns, accompanied by at least 12,000 camp followers, excluding the women and children.[76] The column snaked out of the cantonment at around 9:00 AM on January 6, 1842, with the last element

arriving in the first halting place at 2:00 AM the following morning. With no adequate transport (only 2,000 camels and ponies), the army covered only six miles during this initial stage. As the army proceeded, the *ghazis* and local freebooters were on its heels, attacking from the rear and the flanks, killing camp followers, and plundering the baggage. Half of the *Sepoys* became unfit to fight, two guns were abandoned at the cantonment, two others were spiked between Bagrami and Butkhak, and some units of Shah Shuja deserted on the second day. At Butkhak, Akbar Khan appeared and halted the column there until the next morning with promises to escort the column to Jalalabad. He asked for more hostages and took Major Pottinger and Captains Lawrence and Mackenzie so that the force would not march beyond Tezin until he received the news that the Sale brigade had evacuated Jalalabad. After demanding and receiving an immediate subsidy of 15,000 rupees, the Afghan chief disappeared again. Thus in two days the army had marched only 10 miles and had had an enormous loss in men and baggage. Hundreds of men and women were found dead in the snow each morning as the army prepared to march on.

The most destructive attacks on the column took place during its passage through three passes: the Khord-Kabul, the Tezin, and the Jegdalek.[77] At the Khord-Kabul, which was reached on January 8, Ghilzai gunmen blocked the narrow defile and engaged the force from the flanks by *Jezail* fire. The column managed to pass only when a detachment held a commanding position at the mouth of the defile. About 500 soldiers and over 2,500 camp followers were killed in the pass. Pottinger claimed that he heard Akbar Khan asking the tribesmen in Pashto to “kill them” while in Persian he called to stop the firing.[78] Another eyewitness, Vincent Eyre, who was part of the column, offered a different observation, saying, “Several of Muhammad Akbar’s chief adherents, who had preceded the advance, exerted themselves strenuously

to keep down the fire but nothing could restrain the Ghilzais, who seemed fully determined that nobody should interfere to disappoint them of their prey."[79] The column resumed the march on January 9 after an all-night snowfall. It covered barely a mile when it was halted by Akbar Khan, who demanded that all women and children be given under his protection. Elphinstone consented only to free them of the misery caused by the cold, hunger, and exhaustion.



Destruction of British Division between Kabul and Jalalabad, January 6–14, 1842.

On January 10 the reduced column proceeded, and the advance guard consisted of all that remained of the 44th Regiment and a cavalry detachment with a single gun. It marched unmolested for two miles, but once it reached the

Tangi-Tariki (the darkness gorge), which was about 10 feet wide, it came under heavy fire from the heights and lost many men. The defile was short, however, and the advance guard made it to the next halting place at Khak-e Jabar (Qabr-e Jabar), about five miles ahead of the rest of the column. There it waited for the main body that never arrived. The main body was entrapped in the narrow gorge while swarms of Ghilzai fighters descended from the steep slopes, with swords in hand, wreaking havoc within the long line of exhausted soldiers and camp followers. It was “utter butchery.” The stragglers that reached the camp brought the terrible news of the carnage to the advance guard in Khak-e Jabar. The column was now reduced to about 1,000 souls, including 70 files of the 44th Regiment and 150 troopers, a 50-man detachment of artillery with a single gun, and a considerable body of camp followers. Elphinstone’s remonstration with Akbar Khan for his failure to deliver on his guarantees of the safe passage of the column was met with excuses that he or the Ghilzai chiefs were unable to control their men. He offered to guarantee the safe conduct of the European officers and men if they laid down their arms and placed themselves under the sardar’s protection.

The officers rejected Akbar Khan’s offer, and the column resumed its march toward the Tezin Valley, fighting its way through the three-mile-long Haft-Kotal Pass. It succeeded thanks to the persistent efforts of Brigadier Shelton, who covered the rear and fended off successive attacks by Ghilzai tribesmen. Thus the force was saved from destruction in the pass and arrived at 4:00 PM in Tezin. At this point the column had lost 12,000 men, including the camp followers, since leaving Kabul.[80]

Disappointed by Akbar Khan’s ineffectual protection of the force, the column pressed on to Jegdalek, 22 miles further on, conducting a rapid night march in the hope of overtaking the enemy before he could occupy the passes. The night march was interrupted by the occasional rush of panic-

stricken camp followers to the front of the column, clogging the route on which the force had to proceed. Due to such delays, by dawn on January 11, the advance guard reached Kattar-Sang, still 10 miles short of Jegdalek. By then the tribesmen were alerted and had mounted the surrounding heights. Under constant enemy harassment, the bleeding column reached Jegdalek around 3:00 PM and took up positions in some ruins located on an elevated ground next to the road. There they were joined by the rearguard that followed under Brigadier Shelton. Here, at a conference with Akbar Khan, General Elphinstone, Brigadier Shelton, and Captain Johnson were taken hostage pending the evacuation of Jalalabad. Like the other hostages under Akbar Khan's protection, they were treated well and provided sustenance. The sardar also promised that immediate arrangements should be made to supply food to the starving troops and their safe transfer to Jalalabad. The lengthy conference of the general and the chiefs on January 12 in Jegdalek rendered few tangible results. Shortly after, Brigadier Anquetil, to whom the command of the withering British column had devolved, was assured that everything had been peaceably settled and that the remnant of the British army would be allowed to proceed unmolested to Jalalabad. But the sound of firing from the Jegdalek Pass heralded a different story—the Ghilzais had expressed their intentions with gunfire. As the darkness thickened, the remnant of the column (now reduced to 120 of the 44th and 25 artillery men), resumed their perilous march at 8:00 PM up the treacherous pass, which was blocked by abbattis barriers. "A terrible fire was now poured in from all quarters," wrote Eyre,

> and a massacre even worse than that of Tangi-Tariki commenced, the Afghans rushing in furiously upon the pent-up crowd of troops and followers, and committing wholesale slaughter. A miserably small remnant managed to clear the barriers. Twelve officers, amongst whom was Brigadier Anquetil, were killed. Upwards of forty others succeeded in pushing through, about twelve of whom, being pretty well mounted, rode on ahead of the rest with

the few remaining cavalry, intending to make the best of their way to Jalalabad.[81]

At daybreak on January 13, the exhausted small body of survivors reached Gandamak, 35 miles southwest of Jalalabad, where the local inhabitants, with the fervor of *Jihad*, were moving to surround them. Undaunted by the overwhelming enemy numbers and reluctant to submit to the calls of surrender, the small party with a few rounds of ammunition remaining in their pouches put up a desperate resistance and fought to the last. Except for a few men who were taken prisoners, the rest were all massacred. Among the prisoners was Captain Souter of the 44th Regiment, who had wrapped the regimental color round his waist. The tribesmen thought he looked like an important person worth a high ransom.

Meanwhile, a few others pressed on ahead of the column from Surkhab, a place between Jegdalek and Gandamak, but only six of them, including Captains Bellew, Collyer, and Hopkins, Lieutenant Bird, and Doctors Harpur and Brydon, reached Fateh-abad, 16 miles from Jalalabad. The rest fell out one by one along the way. In Fateh-abad, they were offered food by some peasants, but soon a body of armed inhabitants attacked them, killing Bellew and Bird on the spot. The four others rode on and were overtaken by their pursuers, who killed three others, leaving Dr. Brydon as the sole survivor to appear under the walls of Jalalabad. He was wounded and exhausted.

Thus perished 4,500 fighting men and 12,000 camp followers during the course of eight days over a distance of some 55 miles. The cold, frost, snow, and hunger took a heavier toll on the force than did the Ghilzais' *Jezail* shots and the *ghazis*' slashing swords.

The Final Act

The destruction of the Kabul garrison sent alarm waves across the passes to India. British authorities faced difficult choices. There were still key areas in Afghanistan under British occupation, including Kandahar, Qalat, Ghazni, and Jalalabad. These were increasingly threatened by the Afghan nationalists. The immediate concern was to relieve these isolated posts before they met the same fate as the Kabul column. Then there was the question of restoring the prestige and credibility of British authority in the region, which was seriously damaged by the utter destruction of its military by the Afghan tribesmen. And finally, the British government and its viceroy in India needed to reassess and revise their Afghan policy and chart out a new strategy in dealing with Afghanistan under the changed conditions.

The British garrisons in Afghanistan, except Ghazni, managed to survive the serious threat made by local Afghan leaders until they were relieved by forces dispatched from India. In Jalalabad, Brigadier Sale decided to hold the city until his forces were relieved. His troops repaired the defenses of the city and expelled 2,000 inhabitants of the town, including a couple hundred Afghan soldiers of the *Jezailchis* regiment, to ensure security. In April, however, news arrived of the failure of the relief force, under General Pollock, to force the Khyber Pass. The brigade had to depend on itself and launched a daring attack on Akbar Khan's camp. It was about three miles west of the city and south of the Kabul River, around today's Darunta and Surkhrud area. At daybreak on April 7, Brigadier Sale led an attack of 1,200 combat troops supported by artillery in three infantry columns commanded, from the right to the left, by Captain Havelock, Colonel Dennie, and Lieutenant Colonel Monteath. The Afghan camp had some 5,000 to 6,000 fighters.[82] Akbar Khan had drawn his troops up on line between the river on the left and a fort on the right. Colonel Dennie at the head of the 13th Regiment of Foot (Somerset Light Infantry) moved in the center and rode directly against the advance

defensive fort 800 yards from the city. Five yards from the walls, he received a fatal wound in the hip from a musket ball.[83] His troops, however, overwhelmed the post and pressed on to catch up with the other columns. Meanwhile, Captain Havelock, advancing on the right along the right bank of the Kabul River, had to form squares more than once against the Afghan horse, which did not dare to charge. As all the advancing columns came on line, Brigadier Sale ordered a general attack, and the infantry engaged the Afghan ranks with musket volleys from their extended rank formation.[84] The joint action dislodged the Afghan troops from their positions. The British captured their guns, which included the four guns lost by the Kabul column in January. Akbar Khan's army was routed and left for Laghman. Thus the Jalalabad garrison performed its own relief before General Pollock finally arrived on April 18. His army was about 8,000 strong, consisting of eight infantry regiments, three-plus cavalry regiments, two batteries of artillery, and a mountain train. Governor General Ellenborough (1790–1870) designated the Sale brigade as "the Illustrious Garrison," and the 13th Regiment designated April 7 "Jalalabad Day" as part of its regimental history.[85]

Elsewhere, the British garrisons struggled to hold their own pending the arrival of a relief force. On February 21, after some two months' delay, General Nott, commanding the Kandahar garrison, got the letter of Elphinstone and Pottinger instructing him to evacuate Kandahar and Qalat. Much had happened during this lapse of time to make the orders binding. Nott and his political officer Rawlinson decided to hold on. The Afghan chiefs threatened to attack the garrison unless it evacuated the city. Shah Shuja sent dispatches claiming full sovereignty and ordered the British forces out. On January 28, the Kandahar garrison received an official letter from British authorities ordering them to continue the occupation of Kandahar. The garrison expelled

the Afghan inhabitants of the city (numbering some 5,000) on March 3 and a few days later attacked and drove away the threatening Durrani tribesmen. During the next two months, the beleaguered Kandahar garrison repulsed repeated attempts by the Afghan tribesmen and the *ghazis* until it was finally relieved by the delayed arrival of General England. The force arrived on May 10 from Quetta. It had failed to force the Kozhak Pass during its first attempt. The Ghazni garrison, comprising some 400 troops under Colonel Palmer, failed to survive. The treaty that the garrison made with the Afghans was broken. The Afghans had pledged to escort the troops to Peshawar. The hard-pressed body was surrounded in the citadel. It surrendered on March 6 and was massacred almost to the last man. The isolated garrison of Qalat was saved by the dispatch of a brigade from Kandahar to relieve it at a time when the walled post was about to be scaled and overrun by some 4,000 Ghilzai tribesmen. The Kandahar brigade defeated the attackers, destroyed the Qalat fort, and withdrew the garrison to Kandahar.

Meanwhile, Shah Shuja was faced with an odd situation. Like all puppets, he resented his authority being controlled during the occupation, and once his foreign backers were gone, he overplayed his independence and nationalism to polish his hollow credentials. But he commanded neither the military power nor the legitimacy to match his assertiveness. Nawab Zaman Khan was the nominal king of the nationalist forces and the *ghazis*. They were in an anti-British mood and were in charge.[86] To prove his loyalty to the cause, Akbar Khan, who had become the most influential figure following the killing of Macnaghten, asked the shah to join him in fighting the British forces in Jalalabad. With growing pressure from the Barakzais and the population who called on the shah to join the *Jihad*, Shah Shuja, after much hesitation, decided to comply. Just two days before the Battle of Jalalabad, after appointing his son Shahpur his viceroy in Kabul, Shah Shuja left Bala-Hissar on April 5. He was going to

join his army at Sia-Sang, but on the way his doolie (man-carried transporter) was attacked with musket fire from Shuja-u-Dawlah, son of Zaman Khan, who murdered him on the spot. A religious leader later said, “We sent the small Lott [lord] to join the great Lott.”[87]

With the relief of the British forces in Afghanistan, initial orders went out for their withdrawal to India. There were pressing unfinished jobs, however, that caused changes in plans. Freeing the hostages and restoring the prestige of the empire with the symbolic punishment of the Afghans necessitated the reoccupation of Kabul. In early July 1842, the First Earl of Ellenborough, governor general of India, ordered General Pollock in Jalalabad and General Nott in Kandahar to converge in a coordinated advance on Kabul and, after avenging the massacre of the British forces, withdraw through Peshawar to India.

After his defeat at Jalalabad, Sardar Akbar Khan retired to Laghman and took the hostages with him. On April 11, he moved the hostages to Tezin, where General Elphinstone died on April 23. On May 22, sensing that the prisoners were unsafe there, the sardar shifted them to Shewaki near Kabul. Three months afterward, with the advance of the British columns from Jalalabad and Kandahar, the hostage party was on the road again and was transferred under strong escort to Bamian.

During August 1842, the two strong British columns moved from opposite directions toward the Afghan capital. Their advance was resisted at different places, but the superiority of the advancing armies, energized by their passion for revenge, overpowered all obstacles as they marched violently, leaving a bloody path of destruction and (sometimes indiscriminate) slaughter. General Nott left Kandahar on August 9 at the head of two European and five Native infantry regiments and some cavalry. He faced strong resistance from Shamsuddin Khan, the governor of Ghazni, who blocked his advance at several points. The British

column fought its way through all the way to Kabul, where it arrived on September 17. In the course of his long march Nott destroyed the Ghazni fort, where according to an eyewitness account “the citadel was mined in fourteen places, completely shaken into ruins and destroyed, with the magazine and other buildings. The woodwork of the citadel was burnt. Some of the bastions of the outer walls were ruined and blown up, and the gates fired. The whole of the guns, ten in number, including the Zubber Jung [Zabar-zan], were burst, with several singles and small wall-pieces.”[88] Meanwhile, as instructed by the governor general, Nott took the gates of the Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi Mausoleum, located in Rawza village. These gates were erroneously believed to be the gates of the Hindu temple of Somnath, which were removed by the Ghaznavid sultan after he conquered and destroyed the temple more than eight centuries before. Desperate to restore the wounded prestige of the empire in Afghanistan, Ellenborough wanted to impress the Hindus by pretending that he had “liberated” a symbol of their religious faith. After reaching Kabul, Nott camped five miles from the capital, which was already occupied by Pollock’s division.

On the eastern front, the British forces carried out a number of punitive operations during the summer against the defiant tribes in the Nangrahar districts. On September 7, the Jalalabad column of about 8,000 men that General Pollock had selected to accompany him moved in two divisional columns in one-day intervals to Jegdalek. The leading division was commanded by General Sale and the second was under General McCaskill, who moved on the following day. Next day, the leading division reached Jegdalek, where large numbers of Ghilzai fighters had occupied the heights on both sides of the road. British artillery failed to break the enemy fighters, who continued to hold their ground and engaged the forces below with accurate *Jezail* fire. Since the British muskets were out-

ranged by the Afghans' weapon, Pollock ordered the infantry to mount the heights on both flanks and in the center in order to deal with the *ghazis* by bayonet charge. The fate of the battle was decided by the foot soldiers, who mounted the heights one after the other, forcing the Ghilzai tribesmen to retire. Jegdalek was cleared by the leading division, and the second division passed through it unmolested. Both divisions joined at Tezin on September 11.

Faced with the advance of the British forces in two converging directions, Sardar Akbar Khan moved all his forces to block the Khord-Kabul defile in the face of the advancing enemy. He knew the odds he was facing, but he never wavered. "I know," said the sardar, "that I have everything to lose but it is too late to recede."[89] Pollock's unexpected halt in the Tezin Valley on September 12 emboldened the Barakzai chief. He moved his army forward to the Tezin Valley to confront the enemy there. On the morning of September 13, the British troops woke up to the clatter of Afghan fighters perched on the hills surrounding their camp. The two sides were about to meet for a decisive battle. The Afghan chiefs had deployed their *Jezailchis* on all commanding heights and had their mounted warriors ready on the plain. While the British cavalry charged the Afghan horse and forced it to give way and retire, the British infantry painstakingly climbed the slopes on both sides of the valley for close-quarter combat with the Afghan fighters, who never stopped pouring musket balls from their long-range *Jezails* on the ascending enemy. As in Jegdalek, the British troops counterbalanced their vulnerability to the *Jezailchis* by closing in for a decisive bayonet charge. Both sides fought fiercely, one fired by the passion of revenge, the other inspired by the call of a sacred duty. In the words of Kaye, "many gallant feats were done that day; and many an Afghan warrior died the hero's death on his native hills, cheered by the thought that he was winning Paradise by such martyrdom."[90] The Afghan fighters, driven from the

Tezin hills, desperately fought the enemy at the Haft Kotal Pass, but the heights of the pass were also mounted by the resolute British troops. The fight for the capital was over. Akbar Khan retired to Ghorband and two days later, on September 15, the Pollock divisions reached Kabul. He beat Nott by two days in the race to Kabul.

One last job remained: to rescue the British hostages who were held by Sardar Akbar Khan in Bamian. With the arrival of the new British army to Afghanistan and the defeat of the Afghan chiefs, the hostages themselves saw that the situation was favorable for negotiating their freedom with local Afghan leaders. The party left Bamian for Kabul on September 16.[91] Meanwhile Sir Richmond Shakespeare, General Pollock's secretary, was dispatched from Kabul with 600 Qizil-Bash cavalry to escort the hostages. Finally, the party safely reached Arghandeh on September 20, where it was received by General Sale, who had been dispatched to back up the Shakespeare detachment.[92] There the general joined his wife, Lady Sale, who was among the hostages.

On September 16, General Pollock formally reoccupied Kabul and raised the British flag over the Bala-Hissar fortress. Two days later, Fateh Jang, son of the deceased Shah Shuja, who had fled Kabul and joined the Pollock army at Gandamak on September 1, was installed on the throne. Ghulam Muhammad Khan Popalzai was appointed his vizier. The prince, however, stayed on the throne only for a few days. Once he realized that there would be no direct British support available to him and that the Afghan chiefs would challenge his authority after the retirement of the British army, he decided to accompany Pollock's army to India and to seek asylum in the British Company's dominions.

Most of the resistance leaders were hanging on around Kabul in a wait-and-see mode. A number of them withdrew to Kohdaman, including Aminullah Khan Logari and Sardar

Akbar Khan, who was moving around in the Ghorband Valley. In order to stave off any attempt by the Afghan nationalists to attack the British troops during their return march to India from Kabul, General Pollock ordered a military expedition to Kohdaman. General McCaskill, with two European and three Native infantry regiments, was ordered to deal with the resurgent hostile forces. The Qizil-Bash chief Khan-Shirin Khan and Prince Shahpur, son of Shah Shuja, accompanied the column and cooperated with the British in its punitive sweep across the plains north of Kabul. In Istalif, where Aminullah Khan had established his headquarters, the British troops destroyed the beautiful resort village and devastated the famous vineyards in the area, displacing great numbers of the population. The column then wheeled further north and carried the wave of fire and destruction to Charikar, the scene of the massacre of the Gurkha regiment on November 13, 1841. The column returned to Kabul on October 7.

As Fateh Jang showed unwillingness to remain on the throne after the retirement of the British army, his brother Prince Shahpur was put on the throne. He was supported by the Qizil-Bash chief Khan-Shirin Khan, who was reluctant to see the return of a Barakzai ruler. Other chiefs consented as well. The choice was accepted by the occupying forces and had a positive impact since it saved the Bala-Hissar fortress from destruction, as it was now recognized as the seat of power of a friendly prince. But the Afghan capital did not escape the wrath of the avenging British army bent on punishing the “guilty” city. The houses of the resistance leaders in Kabul were razed to the ground, which included those of Nawab Zaman Khan, Osman Khan, Jabar Khan, and others.

Three days before withdrawal, Pollock ordered his sappers to destroy the main bazaar (Char Chatah), where the Afghan revolutionaries had hung the mutilated body of Macnaghten for public display. The spectacular destruction of the Char Chatah, a splendid business district with historical

significance, was carried out on October 9 and 10. In spite of efforts to protect the city against looters, the British troops themselves turned out to be the main agents of pillage. With the explosions echoing in the bazaar, British soldiers and camp followers poured en masse into the city, roaming through streets, plundering shops and houses, and committing indiscriminate acts of violence against the citizens in a rage of retribution. Even peaceful resident Hindus and the British-friendly Qizil-Bash in the Chendawal neighborhood were not spared. These deplorable excesses were committed during the last three days of the reoccupation of Kabul, and no serious action was taken to rein in the predatory servicemen. Some soldiers of General Nott's camp even extended the pillage to the suburbs of Kabul, plundering the Char-Dehi, Deh-Dana, and Afshar villages. Complaints about the excesses made by the local administration were arrogantly dismissed by General Nott.[93]

Meanwhile, in Kabul, preparations for the evacuation of Afghanistan were underway. General Nott's and Pollock's divisions would move together to Jalalabad and from there to Peshawar. The British combined army left Kabul on October 12, 1842, on its return journey. They took with them the blind Shah Zaman, Shah Shuja's family, and the hostages who had been freed from captivity. The army did not miss an opportunity to act in vengeance on the way back. In Jalalabad, where all the divisions assembled, Pollock ordered the destruction of the city fortifications. From there the British forces headed home through the Khyber Pass. The column stopped at Ali Masjid to destroy its fortifications and proceeded to Punjab through Peshawar. Meanwhile in Kabul, Sardar Akbar Khan descended in force on the capital and dethroned the puppet King Shahpur. After a brief power struggle, the Barakzais got the upper hand. Nawab Zaman Khan, the insurgents' interim king, was appointed governor of Jalalabad, while the government of Ghazni was given to Shamsuddin Khan and that of Kandahar to Sultan Jan.

Earlier in the month, exactly four years after Lord Auckland announced the British military invasion of Afghanistan in support of the regime change, his successor, Ellenborough, proclaimed the withdrawal of British forces from Afghanistan, leaving the Afghans to form the government of their choice. The proclamation of October 1, 1842, also stated that the British government would "willingly recognize any government approved by the Afghans themselves, which shall appear desirous and capable of maintaining friendly relations with neighboring states." The announcement opened the way for allowing all the Afghans held in exile by the British government to return to their country. This included Amir Dost Mohammad Khan, who, after surrendering to the British in November 1840, was transferred to India. During his stay in Calcutta and then in Ludhiana with his family, he was treated with respect and honor by the British government. The conduct of his captors and the power and organization of the British government and its army shown to the amir made a major impression on him that somehow influenced his policy toward the British during his second reign (1843–1863). And yet, during the insurrection in Kabul, he was in communication with his son, Akbar Khan, advising him to do all in his power to destroy the British.[94]

Ever since the failure of British efforts to prop up Shah Shuja in Kabul, the restoration of Dost Mohammad Khan was contemplated as an alternative. Even Lord Auckland, the architect of the plan to remove the amir, did not display any explicit objection to the choice. With the British out of Afghanistan, Amir Dost Mohammad Khan was set at liberty and was escorted by Captain Nicolson to the court of the Maharajah Sher Singh in Lahore. He arrived on January 20, 1843,[95] and was accorded a warm and honorable reception by the Sikh Durbar with whom the amir entered into "a secret treaty of alliance." From there the amir was escorted to the Khyber Pass by the Sikh authorities, and he reentered

his country to a warm and joyful welcome by his son, Sardar Akbar Khan, and other chiefs who greeted him as the amir of Afghanistan.

Thus ended the first Anglo-Afghan war. The war cost Britain dearly, and it wasted a great deal of blood and treasure for no obvious gains. The cost of the war amounted to 17 million pounds sterling; 10,000 fighting men were killed or died of wounds and sickness; and tens of thousands of camp followers perished. The Afghans, the victims of the invasion, lost more men and suffered the destruction of their institutions, their villages, their towns, and their livelihood. The objective of the war was to bring about a friendly regime in Kabul to serve British security interests. The objective was not achieved, and instead the invasion weakened Afghanistan and earned only the enduring hostility of the Afghan people. The threats that British policy makers intended to counter proved to be illusive, and the offer of friendship by the amir of Kabul to the British was real but ignored. Although the British army won many battles, it lost the war because of the wrong policy—a policy that turned a potentially friendly people into defiant and hostile tribes.

Eventually, Amir Dost Mohammad Khan, who was removed through military action, became a British ally after the war. Thus "ended Auckland's melancholy undertaking," wrote the British author Henry Keene, "after adding nearly twenty million to the public debt, creating a deficit of two more in the account of his final year, and permanently lowering the respectful awe which the British power had hitherto commanded in India and Asia."[96]

The distinguished chronicler of the war John William Kaye summarized it best:

> The policy which we pursued was disastrous, because it was unjust. It was, in principle and in act, an unrighteous usurpation, and the curse of God was on it from the first. Our successes at the outset were a part of the curse. They lapped us in false security, and deluded us to our overthrow. This is the great

lesson to be learnt from the contemplation of all the circumstances of the Afghan War. “The Lord God of recompenses will surely requite.”[97]

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5 Geopolitical Changes in Central Asia Leading to the Second Anglo-Afghan War

1842–1879

Only a generation after the end of the first Anglo-Afghan war, the geopolitical situation in Central Asia underwent monumental changes. Meanwhile, major shifts in power relationships within Afghanistan and the region spawned new conflicts and competitions that inevitably pulled Afghanistan into a new, bloody confrontation as it was invaded by a much-larger and better-equipped British military just 36 years after the end of its first aggression. The political and military context leading to war entailed domestic, regional, and colonial dimensions.

Afghanistan emerged from the first Anglo-Afghan war militarily weak and politically fragmented. The defeat of the British forces by the Afghans exacted a high price in the country's political stability. Historically, foreign invasions were fought by decentralized Afghan forces, which often resulted in the emergence of a host of local strongmen and warlords following the expulsion of the invading powers. This exacerbated the problems in reestablishing the authority of the state. It was the case in the aftermath of the Anglo-

Afghan wars in the nineteenth century and that of the Soviet invasion in the 1980s. The postvictory rulers often faced the tough challenge of reining in the power of their nonstate actors. Although Amir Dost Mohammad Khan returned to the throne of Kabul, his authority was strained not only by the assertive provincial rulers but also by the tribal warlords who rose to positions of fame and influence while fighting the British occupation. In Kandahar, Kohendil Khan returned from Persia and reclaimed his seat of power in the province. To the west, the crafty Vizier Yar Mohammad Khan of Herat robbed and murdered the last Sadozai ruler, Shah Kamran, in 1842 and seized power as an absolute ruler. He expanded his authority over the small principalities in the north extending from Maimana to Andkhoy and Aqcha and continued intriguing with the Persian court. Elsewhere across the country the self-centric veterans of war expected to be rewarded with power-sharing privileges.

During the first few years of the amir's second term on the throne, the real and self-styled war heroes, including Nawab Zaman Khan, Sultan Ahmad Khan (Sultan Jan), Mohammad Shah Khan Babakar-khel, and even the amir's son, Sardar Mohammad Akbar Khan, acted emphatically, challenging the authority of the amir. The amir was forced to appease them by giving them provincial governments and other formal and informal high positions. Akbar Khan was named the vizier but he still often acted independently.

Meanwhile, the war experience and three years of exile in British detention had made a visible impact on Dost Mohammad Khan. He now acted with notable sobriety in his domestic and foreign policies and saw his capabilities and limitations in more realistic terms. On the other hand, the war made his son, Sardar Akbar Khan, and his associates more ambitious with dreams of recovering the lost lands of the Afghan empire, which were being overrun one by one by the expanding British India. Sardar Akbar Khan's anti-British feelings moved him to seek alliance with alternative powers.

He even teamed up with Yar Mohammad in reaching out to the Persian court to seek its assistance in checking the growing expansion of the British in the Indus Valley. Knowing that the extension of Kabul's authority beyond its current limits required sufficient means and opportune moments, the amir was opposed to rash actions and adventurous projects. He disapproved of the ambitions of his aspiring son, and this created a gap in trust and harmony between them and prompted the young vizier to quit the palace and establish himself amid his Qizil-Bash regiments and his Ghilzai supporters. He became so adamant in his plans that he challenged his father for the throne. But before he took any adverse actions, he mysteriously died at the age of 31, possibly poisoned.

The amir also faced the herculean tasks of rebuilding a devastated country, where, according to contemporary Afghan sources, the agriculture around Kabul and other major urban areas was seriously damaged by the war. The difficulty of tax collection shrunk government revenue significantly. The ruling family and its extended network of adherents, nobles, sardars, and insatiable tribal chiefs and veterans of war absorbed a large chunk of the revenue, leaving insufficient resources to rehabilitate the country after the war. Rebuilding the military forces was the toughest job, not because of the lack of recruits but due to the limited ability of the government to pay the military. Immediately, the amir formed five regular army regiments of 800 men each and put them under his three sons.[1]

Drawing on his wartime experience and observations in India, Amir Dost Mohammad Khan initiated measures to professionalize the army and curb the dependence of the state military establishment on tribal levies and tribal influence. In order to improve government control, he increased the size of the regular army and introduced organization, training, and command and control reforms. Sardar Mohamed Akbar Khan paid much attention to

improving discipline modeled on the British army and to organizing the cavalry into squadrons.[2] But his early death slowed the effort. The northern provinces under the amir's son Afzal Khan, who governed most of Afghan Turkistan from Balkh, provide a good model of such reforms. The former officer of the Anglo-Indian army William Campbell, now serving Dost Muhammad, directed the reorganization of the army. As noted earlier, Campbell converted to Islam, assumed the name of Sher Mohammad Khan, and rose to the position of commander in chief of the Balkh forces.[3] He is closely associated with the evolution of the Afghan army from tribal levies to a professional institution.

Although Amir Dost Muhammad strongly supported reform and modernized the army's armament with 8,000 tower muskets supplied to him by the Indian government,[4] he was unable to bring about major changes in the military structure across the country. The death of Campbell, soon after the demise of the amir in 1863, suspended the reform, which was resumed later with much vigor and substantial dynamism under Amir Sher Ali Khan (reigned 1863–1879), who adopted an Anglo-Indian model as the working basis for his reorganization of the Afghan army.

British major H. B. Lumsden, who visited Afghanistan in 1857, offers a detailed list of the Afghan regular army units and areas of their deployment.[5] In his assessment the Afghan regular army consisted of 16 infantry and three cavalry regiments and an assortment of nearly 80 artillery pieces. This excluded the army of Herat since at this time Herat was not under the control of the Kabul amir but was ruled independently. Half of the infantry and all of the cavalry regiments were deployed in three provinces of Balkh in the north, Kandahar in the south, and the Kabul-Kohistan area in the center.[6] Other major garrisons, including Bamian, Kohistan, Ghazni, Aqcha, Qalat, Girishk, and Farah, were garrisoned by at least one infantry regiment and different

numbers of guns. The infantry units were inferior to cavalry and the artillery was poorly trained in professional gunnery. The nominal strength of an infantry regiment was 800 men and that of a cavalry regiment was 300 troopers, who were armed with an assortment of nonstandardized weapons, including matchlocks, sabers, spears, and shields. The cavalry was organized in imitation of the British Indian light cavalry, copying even their hussar saddles and steel cupboards. The government owned a contingent of 3,500 *Jezailchis* (light infantry troops), armed with matchlocks (or *Jezail*), which were organized in companies of 100 soldiers and sections of 10 troops commanded by *Sad-bashis* and *Dah-bashis,* respectively. They were deployed in the forts around the country and paid and equipped by the government. The followers of sardars and other chiefs also included *Jezailchi* contingents.

The regular army was augmented by irregular military contingents provided as needed by local chieftains in predetermined quotas in exchange for land grants and local tax payments. Their nominal number was estimated at 38,000 horsemen, including 8,000 from Kandahar, 5,000 from Ghazni, 15,000 from Kabul, Jalalabad, Logar, and Kohdaman, and 10,000 from Balkh. During military operations, a *Pesh-Khema*, or “advance party,” was sent out a considerable time before the march in order to give the local chiefs time to fill out their quota of horse.

As no regular commissariat service was established, the army lived off local resources paid for by tax allotments. Where the revenues were paid in grain, a certain proportion was allotted to each garrison. In the areas of military operations, supply parties carried orders (*barat*) out on the chiefs of villages to provide for the advancing army. The villages were given tax credit for the amount of grain they supplied to the army. Given the army’s professional capacity, maneuverability, and support system, it was not a match for a well-equipped and well-disciplined British army, but it was

far superior to the strength and sustainability of rebellious tribes.

The French author General Joseph Ferrier, who traveled into Afghanistan in the mid-nineteenth century, provides an account of Afghanistan's central and provincial armies, including Herat. His account lists much larger military formations deployed across the country. He may have included the irregular army in his overall count. According to him, under Dost Mohammad Khan, the regular army, called *daftari* (registered), was deployed in four major territorial regions: Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, and Balkh, with a total number of 55,000 cavalry and 26,000 infantry.[7] Sayed Jamaluddin Afghani, who visited Afghanistan in the 1860s, wrote that the amir's regular army numbered 60,000 troops.[8]

Strategic Shifts in the Region

Significant changes took place in the region after the first Anglo-Afghan war in the east: the British expanded their control further to the west, from the riverine barriers of Punjab to the mountain walls of the Suleiman and Spin Ghar ranges, bounding the territory of the amir of Kabul. Only a year after the end of the Anglo-Afghan war, the amirs of Sind rose up against the British to end the "temporary occupation" of Sind, which began during the passage of the Army of the Indus to Afghanistan in 1839. The British forces under General Charles Napier from the Bombay presidency entered Sind in 1843 and dominated the province through coopting and suppressing local amirs. The British forces defeated the hastily raised army of the amir of Sind, Mir Nasir Khan Talpur, on February 17, 1843, at the Battle of Miani. This hotly contested encounter was fought six miles north of the capital, Hyderabad. Sindhi cavalry fought gallantly against the well-trained and better-equipped British

forces. The encounter resulted in the annexation of Sind to the British territories, which expanded to the area of the khan of Kalat, the capital of Baluchistan.

At the same time, internal dynastic strife within the Sikh state of Punjab brought the militarist factions of *Khalsa* into power. Alarmed by the British occupation of the Sind in the south and afraid of facing the same fate, the Sikh army incorporated loosely organized *Khalsa* and started to act aggressively, leading to war with the British.[9] The Anglo-Sikh war was fought in two phases. In the first Sikh war in 1848, the Sikh army suffered decisive defeat in four successive border battles and was forced to sue for peace. The Treaty of Lahore, signed on March 9, 1846, reduced the Sikh state to a British protectorate. While the maharaja stayed on the throne, a British resident, Sir Henry Rawlinson, took control of the country's policy, and a network of British political agents was established throughout the Sikh state.

Two years later, resentment against British control caused the renewal of hostility, leading to three major battles between the Sikh armies and the British forces being fought across the territory of Punjab. At that time, Amir Dost Mohammad Khan responded to repeated calls from the Sikh leaders requesting his help in the war. In return, they offered to return Peshawar, the Derajat (Dera Ismail Khan and Dera Ghazi Khan), and some other districts in Punjab to the amir's rule after the war. Riding a wave of anti-British public sentiment and hoping to regain his lost territories, the amir and his four sons marched to Peshawar and on to the banks of the Indus River. On February 19, 1849, the Sikh force of 60,000 men with 59 guns (commanded by Sher Singh) was met at Gujrat, north of the Chenab River, by a British army of 24,000 men with 96 guns (under General Hugh Gough). The amir of Kabul dispatched a body of 5,000 cavalry under his son, Sardar Akram Khan, to fight with the Sikhs at the Battle of Gujrat. After the defeat of the Sikhs in the battle, the Afghan contingent was forced to retire. Meanwhile, a British

column under General Gilbert crossed the Indus at Attock in pursuit of Amir Dost Mohammed's army and marched into Peshawar. The amir returned to Jalalabad heartbroken and lost all hope for regaining Peshawar. Finally, on March 30, 1849, Maharaja Dalip Singh signed away all claims to the rule of Punjab, and the territories of the state were annexed. Thus, Punjab became part of British India, and Sikh soldiers began to join the East India Company's army. One of the spoils of the Sikh wars was the globally famed Koh-i-Nur diamond. Weighing 106 carats, the jewel was forcefully seized by Ranjit Singh from Shah Shuja when he had taken refuge in Lahore after losing his Afghan throne in 1809.

To the west, Herat came under increasing Persian influence following the death of Yar Mohammad Khan Alkozai in 1851. His son, Sayed Mohammad Khan, succeeded him but lacked the resourcefulness of his father and attached himself to Persia in order to strengthen his position. Britain reacted by negotiating and imposing a convention upon the shah signed by the prime minister (*Sadr Azam*) on March 2, 1853. The convention stipulated that "the Persian Government engages not to send troops on any account to the territory of Herát, excepting when troops from without attack that place, that is to say, troops from the direction of [K]abul or from [K]andahar, or from other foreign territory."[10]

Meanwhile, Sayed Mohammad was ousted by a Sadozai chief, Mohammad Yusuf, who put him to death in revenge of Shah Kamran's murder by Yar Mohammad in 1842. Persia could hardly resist the temptation to intervene in the unstable situation in Herat in spite of its commitment to noninterference under its treaty with the British (which the Shah felt was imposed on him). Persian plans to reinvade Herat were encouraged by Russia during the Crimean War (1853–1856) to get Britain entangled in a conflict with Persia while the war between Russia and the alliance of Britain, France, and the Ottoman Empire was going on. A Persian army marched to Herat in the spring of 1856 and was

welcomed by the Sadozai chief of the province. Despite a public uprising against their tyrannical conduct, the Persians reestablished their control in Herat by the autumn of 1856. The situation led to British military intervention in Persia again. A British task force landed and occupied the Kharg (Khark) Island, 300 miles northwest of the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf, while a force under Sir James Outram moved inland, defeated a Persian army, and captured the strategic Port of Bushehr, 757 miles south of Tehran. Persia called for peace, and under a treaty negotiated and signed in Paris on March 4, 1857, the shah agreed

> to relinquish all claims to sovereignty over the territory and city of Herat and the countries of Afghanistan, and never to demand from the chiefs of Herat, or of the countries of Afghanistan, any marks of obedience, such as the coinage, or *Khutba* or tribute. His Majesty further engages to abstain hereafter from all interference with the internal affairs of Afghanistan. His Majesty promises to recognize the independence of Herat, and of the whole of Afghanistan, and never to attempt to interfere with the independence of those states.[11]

Although Dost Mohammad was at that time in alliance with the British, the British failed to help transfer Herat to the amir's rule, which would have made sense. Instead, the amir's rival nephew, Sardar Sultan Ahmad Khan, was appointed with the consent of Persia as the governor of Herat. The governor agreed that the *Khutba* be read in the name of the shah. Five more years passed before the amir decided to annex Herat.

The political shifts in the region resulted in the reengagement of the amir of Kabul with its British neighbor. Britain had added first Sind and then the territories of the Sikhs to its dominions, thus extending its northwest reach up to the mountainous frontiers of the amir. Given the experience of the first Anglo-Afghan war, the changes in the region, and the shadow of Russian expansion, the British were interested in securing the unification of Afghanistan under a strong leader with friendly ties to the Company. Two

treaties were concluded between the British and the Afghans to establish the relationship between the two sides. A treaty of May 1, 1855, negotiated and signed by Sir John Lawrence as chief commissioner of the Punjab and Sardar Ghulam Haidar Khan, Amir Dost Mohammad Khan's son and representative, stipulated mutual respect and noninterference by both sides, and the amir agreed to be "the friends of the friends and enemy of the enemies of the Honorable East India Company." There was no similar pledge on the British part and the British commitment to noninterference did not last.[12] This commitment by the amir was used by his enemies and the mullahs against him during his campaign to annex Kandahar in the same year. The mullahs accused Dost Mohammad of renouncing his religion by promising to be the friend of the friends of the British.

Less than two years later, another treaty was concluded, on January 26, 1857, when the British were at war with Persia. The compact among other things provided that the British pay 100,000 rupees (10,000 pounds) per month to Dost Mohammad for military purposes, enabling him to protect his possessions in Balkh, Kabul, and Kandahar against Persia. The treaty stipulated that the amir maintain an adequate army and allow British officers to reside in Afghanistan to ensure that the subsidy was paid and to keep the government of British India informed, but otherwise not to interfere in the internal affairs of the Afghan government. Two articles of the treaty of 1857 established that the subsidy shall cease upon the establishment of peace between the British and Persians, and the second article mentioned that British officers shall be withdrawn from Kabul but a non-European representative of the British government shall remain in Kabul while a representative of the Afghan government shall remain in Peshawar. These two articles became significant later when the British tried to invoke them to press Dost Mohammad's successor, Amir Sher Ali, to receive European British officers to reside in his dominions.[13]

The outbreak of the Indian mutiny in 1857 caused excitement in Afghanistan, with the mullahs agitating the population and calling on the amir's government to intervene in support of the Muslim uprisings and restore the Muslim rule in India. The amir kept his pledge of not interfering in the territories of the British and stayed neutral. The British officers residing in Kandahar were protected and continued their mission, particularly in providing the real picture of the situation in India, countering wild speculations that spoke of the total massacre of the British in India. The amir's policy was seemingly rewarded by the British indirect support of Dost Mohammad's campaign to annex Herat by discouraging the Persian court from helping their protectorate governor of Herat, Sardar Sultan Ahmad Khan.

The Unification of Afghanistan

It took Dost Mohammad 20 years, the whole length of his second term, to unify the country from Herat to Ali Masjid in the Khyber Pass and from the Amu Darya River in the north to Kandahar in the south. Meanwhile, he rebuilt his military, financial, and administrative institutions. Faced with numerous contenders for power, he trusted the provincial governments to his sons, of which he was never short. While he refused to challenge the autonomous rule of the Kandahar Barakzai chiefs as long as Kohendil Khan was living and had lost all hopes of regaining Peshawar, the amir ventured north to reannex the provinces between the Hindu Kush and the Amu Darya.

While he was no longer obsessed with regaining Peshawar, he saw the unification of the country as the key to consolidation of the state he was presiding over. The long wars of Amir Nasrullah (reigned 1826–1860) of the Bukhara khanate with the khanates of Khoqand and Khiva weakened the influence of the emirate over the Uzbek principalities in

northern Afghanistan—the Afghan Turkistan. In 1850, he dispatched an army under his third son, Akram Khan, to the north, which met a combined army of the local rulers of the northern provinces from Sheberghan to Balkh. They met at Saighan, north of Bamian. Attacking from the two sides, the Kabul army defeated the northern forces and advanced through Dara-e Suf to Balkh and captured the town. The fall of Balkh forced the rulers of other northern cities to acknowledge the authority of the amir of Kabul. Since then the northern provinces, which were lost to Bukhara in 1826, have been reunited with the Afghan provinces south of the Hindu Kush. Shortly after the consolidation of his power in the north, the internal power struggle among Kandahari sardars (following the death of Kohendil Khan in 1855) offered the opportunity for the amir to march on the city and take control of the province. With the expansion of his power in the country, Amir Dost Mohammad Khan's political standing and credibility amid the weakening Central Asian khanates was significantly elevated, leading to a cooperative relationship with the British.

The question of Herat and the amir's desire to reintegrate it into the Afghan state was complicated by family, political, and interstate complications. As noted earlier, after the evacuation of Herat by the Persians in 1857, the province was ruled by Sardar Sultan Ahmad Khan, a hero of the Anglo-Afghan war who happened to be the amir's nephew and his son-in-law. Further, not being in favor of Dost Mohammad's policy of accommodation with the British, the self-centric sardar leaned toward the Persian court and was closely linked with Tehran, which endorsed his rule in Herat. He even acted as Persian tributary. In 1862, when Sultan Ahmad Khan moved south to extend his control over Farah and beyond, the amir was alarmed and marched at the head of a large army to deal with Herat once and for all. The Kabul army laid siege to Herat for about ten months. One reason for the long siege was Sultan Ahmad Khan's and the Heratis' hope that

the Persians would intervene by sending an army to help Herat. However, British pressure discouraged the shah from intervention in accordance with the Paris treaty of 1857.[14]

On May 27, 1863, the Kabul army undermined the walls and stormed the city. Herat fell and the Kabul army pillaged the town. Thirteen days later, Amir Dost Mohammad Khan died in Herat and was buried there, at the site of his last act of unification of Afghanistan. The city, whose defense against Persian invasion a quarter century earlier became instrumental in the British policy to remove Dost Mohammad from the throne, was finally saved from Persian domination by Dost Mohammad himself at a different time and under a different situation.

Of the 27 sons of the amir, only three of them predeceased him, including his heir apparent, Sardar Ghulam Haidar Khan, the defender of Ghazni during the first Anglo-Afghan war. Many of the surviving sons were appointed to provincial and district governments across the country during the lifetime of their father and each commanded a following. This situation led to a dynastic struggle after the death of Dost Mohammad that lasted several years. Although the amir named his sixth son, Sardar Sher Ali, his successor, his authority was challenged by a number of his siblings. Among them, his two elder brothers, Sardar Afzal Khan, the governor of Turkistan (along with his ambitious son Abdur Rahman Khan), and Sardar Mohammad A'zam Khan were the leading contenders, who found allies within the "band of brothers" and their associates. During the first three years of his reign, Sher Ali was busy dealing with his rivals. He defeated the contenders to the crown during the first years of his reign but lost his throne in early 1866 to his brothers. In the next two years Sardar Afzal Khan and Sardar A'zam Khan successively ruled in Kabul until Amir Sher Ali triumphantly returned and reclaimed his throne.

During the following decade of his rule, Amir Sher Ali was faced with the enormous tasks of consolidating his power at

home and responding to growing security challenges from outside. In Bukhara, the self-exiled Afghan power contenders, including the maverick Sardar Abdur Rahman Khan and his cousin Sardar Ishaq Khan (son of Azam Khan), were intriguing with Amir Muzaffar of Bukhara (reigned 1860–1886) and the Russian colonialists against the amir. In July 1869, Ishaq Khan, at the head of an army comprising Turkmen, crossed the Amu Darya and attacked Aqcha and then advanced on Balkh but was defeated by Sher Ali's governor and fled across the Amu Darya. Further, the domination of the khanate of Bukhara by the Russians tempted Sher Ali to seize certain key locations across the river, but he was advised against the plan by the British Government, which did not want a confrontation with Bukhara, which had become a Russian protectorate. The amir's plans to designate his young son, Abdullah Jan, as his successor drove his elder son, Yaqub Khan, into rebellion. He took possession of Herat in May 1871, along with his younger brother, Sardar Ayub Khan, later the victor of the Battle of Maiwand. Although the rebel prince Yaqub Khan was reconciled with the amir through intermediaries and was reappointed governor of Herat by his father, he revolted again two years later when the amir confirmed the appointment of Abdullah Jan as his heir apparent. He failed, however, to fund his rebellion and was called to Kabul under a safe conduct where the amir jailed him and he stayed incarcerated for five years. With the failure of the first rebellion, Sardar Ayub Khan fled to Persia. Viceroy Lord Northbrook (1872–1876) unsuccessfully tried a reconciliation, which only left the amir with hard feelings.

The Genesis of the Second Anglo-Afghan War

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, when imperial Russia's steady advance into Central Asia was seen

as a threat to the British possession in India, the strategic concepts to counter the menace evolved as the distance separating the forward lines of the two powers grew closer and closer. Time and space were of prime strategic importance in responding to the enduring threat. The defense of Herat against the Russo-Persian invasion was the key element in the policy of the 1830s, leading to the British occupation of Afghanistan. About two decades later, with the annexation of Punjab, the British frontier expanded to the mountainous border of Afghanistan. Russia was moving south from its border chain of forts skirting the edge of the Kazak desert from the Orenburg-Omsk line to the Syr Darya basin. Afghanistan with the rugged space of the country was considered a formidable barrier to any potential Russian advance.

During the Afghan dynastic war that followed the death of Amir Dost Mohammad, the British government observed its commitment to noninterference in Afghanistan and to support whoever emerged as the ruler in control of the country and respected the British treaties concluded with Amir Dost Mohammad. But this British neutrality was conveniently grounded in local considerations and was handily ignored when the threats looming far beyond the borders of Afghanistan became an element of the British policy toward Afghanistan. True, the British stayed aloof during the Afghan civil war until the Russian threats were seen as real and immediate. Then, Governor General Lord Lawrence moved to assist Sher Ali with money to the tune of 200,000 rupees, as well as with a supply of 3,000 muskets, which helped him complete his success and consolidate his power against his rivals.

Meanwhile, the decade of the 1860s saw a systematic southward expansion of Russia into Central Asia. As long as the Central Asian arid steppes, known to the nineteenth-century European policy makers as the Kirghiz steppe (today’s Kazakstan), formed a buffer between the Russian

military colonies along the Orenburg and Siberia line and the fertile lands of the Uzbek khanates south of the Aral Sea, Britain perceived no serious threat facing India from that direction. It was an area of almost uninhabited desert stretching 2,000 miles from west to east, and nearly 1,000 miles from north to south. But once Russia overcame that intervening desert shield, there was hardly any disincentive to arrest Russia's southward expansion. The Crimean War checked the Russian design, but its outcome stimulated the Tsarist Empire to compensate for its losses in the west by gains in the east through annexing the khanates' territories until it occupied Chimkent in 1864.[15]

A circular issued by the Russian foreign minister, Prince Gorchakov, on November 21, 1864, justified his country's conquests as the responsibility of "civilized" nations to tame the violent primitive areas in their immediate vicinity. He indicated, however, that his country had no intention to make further advances. "The position of Russia in Central Asia," he wrote, "is that of all civilized states which are brought into contact with half-savage nomad populations, possessing no fixed social organization." The circular, basically addressed to the European nations, argued that Imperial Russia was long targeted by pillaging nomadic forces within its frontiers and as it punished and repressed the nomadic hordes more plunderers emerged from the depth of the region that attacked the pacified ones. In dealing with unstable areas in the frontier, the prince compared the Russian effort to the actions by other "civilized states," saying,

> Such has been the fate of every country which has found itself in a similar position. The United States in America, France in Algeria, Holland in her Colonies, England in India—all have been irresistibly forced, less by ambition than by imperious necessity, into this onward march, where the greatest difficulty is to know when to stop. Such, too, have been the reasons which have led the Imperial Government to take up at first a position resting on one side on the Syr-Daria, on the other on the Lake' Issyk-Kaul, and to strengthen these two lines by advanced forts, which, little by little, have crept on into the

> heart of those distant regions, without however succeeding in establishing on the other side of our frontiers that tranquillity which is indispensable for their security.

Therefore, he concluded, Russia intends to carry its frontier "to the limit where the indispensable conditions are to be found."[16]

These Russian strategic views were soon followed by military action extending the influence of Russia farther and farther to the south. A countermemorandum by the renowned British politician and Orientalist Sir Henry Rawlinson (1810–1895), who had served as a political agent in Kandahar in 1840–1842, was circulated in 1865 within the British policy-making centers warning about the threat of Russian advances into Central Asia and beyond. In his memorandum, Rawlinson expressed alarm regarding the dangers of Russian southward expansion. Although he stopped short of recommending a military advance into Afghanistan, he strongly suggested an extension of British authority. "The remedial measures recommended for adoption in the present state of the Central Asian question," he wrote, "may be briefly recapitulated. They are few, but not unimportant. Sher Ali Khan should be subsidized and strengthened at Kabul, our position at that capital being rendered as secure and paramount as would have been Burnes' position at the Court of Dost Mohammad Khan in 1837, if he had been supported by the full weight of Lord Auckland's authority and resources."[17] He also recommended laying down a railway from Lahore to Peshawar.

Because of the dominant attitude of restraint in military advances in Afghanistan, the proposition became a contentious issue within British foreign policy circles.[18] Meanwhile, Prince Gorchakov's assurances notwithstanding, Russia continued its steady southward advance. The imperial troops stormed Tashkent in 1865 and created the Russian province of Turkistan. Then Bukhara faced the same fate.

Samarkand was annexed in 1868, and a year later the amir of Bukhara, Muzaffar u-Din, accepted Russian suzerainty. The Russian army did not stop there but annexed Khiva in 1873 and the khanate of Khoqand three years later.

Russian expansionism in Central Asia caused much anxiety, setting the tone for an intense debate on how to stem the tide of what appeared to be Russia's unrelenting southerly advance. Two distinct schools of thought developed, one advocating a "Forward Policy" and the other opted for "Masterly Inactivity." The proponents of the Forward Policy were in favor of an advance to the Hindu Kush and even farther north to meet the Russian threat at a distance from India's northwest frontier. The adherents of Masterly Inactivity supported a policy of balanced response to actual threats, favoring military restraint and diplomatic activity to deal with actual and proven threats.

One of the frontrunners of the Masterly Inactivity policy was Sir John Lawrence, who served as viceroy of India from 1864 to 1868. His term coincided with the civil war in Afghanistan following the death of Amir Dost Mohammad and the power struggle between his sons. He stayed neutral during the war, but when Sher Ali seemed to emerge as the victor, Lawrence, as noted earlier, helped him with money and guns and a promise of more assistance. When Amir Sher Ali regained his throne, the viceroy invited him to India, which was accepted by the amir, but resurging internal troubles prevented him from meeting Lawrence when he was in office. Instead, the amir met his successor, Lord Mayo, an appointee of the short-lived Conservative government. At the Ambala Conference held in March 1869, the amir sought an alliance with the British and a promise of British aid in case of Russian aggression, along with British recognition of his dynasty and of his son, Abdullah Jan, as his appointed successor. He expected a "fruitful friendship," as he complained that British friendship with his father had been a "dry friendship" and "one sided." He noted that the British

did not help him as they ought to have done, to secure the throne, but simply acknowledged him when, by his “own good sword,” he had secured it, or at least had very nearly secured it, for himself.[19] Mayo, while asserting his government’s sympathies, did not make any specific promises. However, as a sign of friendship, the British Indian government handed Sher Ali 600,000 rupees, 6,500 muskets, four 18-pounder siege guns, two 8-inch howitzers, and a mountain battery of six 3-pounder guns.

In the next 10 years, back-to-back diplomatic mishaps and ensuing mistrust in bilateral relations between Amir Sher Ali and the British government, as well as the policy shifts of great powers on regional issues, drove Afghanistan into another conflict with British India. Three of the issues were of a diplomatic nature and two others of geopolitical inducement. Diplomatically the British role in the arbitration of the Afghan-Persian dispute over Sistan, the British-Russian agreement on their spheres of influence in Central Asia, and the viceroy’s attempted intervention to reconcile the amir with his estranged and rebellious son Yaqub Khan became the source of the amir of Afghanistan’s mistrust and suspicions. The reluctance of the British government to enter into a substantive defensive pact with the amir for geopolitical reasons in 1873 and its forceful demand in 1876 that the amir allow the stationing of British agents in several locations in his country to support British geopolitical interests caused the breakdown of relations between the two allies.

The Border Issues

As one of the amir’s requests at the Ambala Conference was British intervention in stopping alleged Persian encroachments in the disputed areas in Sistan, the viceroy agreed to take up the matter with the Persians. An

arbitration mission under General Frederic Goldsmid and Colonel Frederick Pollock was formed in 1871 to settle the dispute. The British arbitrators assigned the area up to the right bank of the Helmand River to Afghanistan and the rest to the west to Persia. Although the settlement contented neither side, the amir was the most unsatisfied party and considered it an unfriendly action by the British, a feeling that never disappeared from his thoughts. The amir sent his prime minister, Sayed Nur Mohammad Shah, who had represented Afghanistan in the Sistan arbitration, to meet the new viceroy, Lord Northbrook, on his arrival in Bombay to appeal against the decision. The viceroy could not reverse it, but he later promised to offer a half million rupees to the amir in compensation for the ceded territory from Afghanistan once Persia and Afghanistan had indicated their acceptance of the settlement. The offer never satisfied the amir.

The British Liberal government led by William Gladstone that came to power in 1868, after a brief rule by the Conservatives, named the Duke of Argyll secretary of state for India. Being a staunch supporter of the Masterly Inactivity school of thought, the duke moved to settle the Central Asian question through direct negotiation with Russia. In an agreement reached by January 1873 they recognized that a neutral territory should separate the two empires and that Afghanistan lay outside the Russian sphere of influence. The northern boundary of Afghanistan was recognized as the Oxus River (Amu Darya) down to its major bend northward (Khamiab) and a mutually accepted line to the west of the bend that was approximately laid down. The amir’s representative in a meeting with British authorities in Simla in June 1873, Sayed Nur Mohammad Shah, proposed that the acknowledgment by Russia of the amir’s claim to lands south of the Amu Darya should be confirmed by Bokhara and the approximate line west of the river’s great bend (Khamiab)

should be well defined to stave off future Russian encroachments.

Further, the Afghan representative also requested a distinct British commitment to consider any power that commits an aggression on the amir's territory as its own enemy. But he was told that the British government did not share the amir's apprehension about Russian intentions and would act according to the situation to determine whether its assistance was needed and under what circumstances. The viceroy explained that his government assistance would be conditional upon the amir's unreserved acceptance of the advice of the British government in regard to his external relations.[20]

The viceroy's demand that British officers be placed in certain towns within Afghanistan as British government representatives elicited no favorable answer since the Afghan envoy had no instructions on the matter. Sayed Nur Mohammad Shah stated that deployment of the officers would cause mistrust and apprehension. He suggested that with the consent of the amir, a British officer should travel to inspect the northern and western boundaries of Afghanistan and confer with the amir in Kabul on related issues and return. The suggestion was accepted and applied. Another sticking point that was raised by the Afghan envoy regarded the level and nature of the security assistance, which had not been settled to Kabul's satisfaction. The Afghans demanded 20,000 stands-of-arms, including 5,000 Sniders and a large amount of money. The British offer was 5,000 Enfield rifles and one million rupees, including the previously pledged half million as indemnification for the loss of territory in Sistan.

Meanwhile, in June and July 1873, the viceroy sent two communications to the Duke of Argyll, the secretary of state for India, proposing that the British government make a commitment, short of a treaty, to support the amir by troops in the event that his country was attacked from the outside.

He underlined that in light of the amir's concerns about Russian progress near his frontiers, such an arrangement could serve as a deterrent to Russia and would contribute to peace and the satisfaction of the amir as a British ally. The idea, however, was not received favorably by the duke, who agreed to helping the amir when the British saw it fit but opposed the idea of giving the amir outright assurance. On July 24, he wrote, "Cabinet think that you should inform Amir that we do not at all share his alarm, and consider there is no cause for it. But you may assure him we shall maintain our settled policy in Afghanistan, if he abides by our advice in external affairs."[21]

On September 6, 1873, the viceroy sent a letter through Sayed Nur Mohammad Shah to the amir summing up the outcome of the conference. He wrote that the Russian foreign minister, Prince Gorchakov, had officially indicated that while he saw no objection to British officers going to Kabul, he promised not to match it by sending Russian agents there—a fear expressed by the amir's envoy. Further, the viceroy assured the amir that in light of the recent arrangements made with Russia, any Russian invasion of Afghanistan was more remote than ever. In conclusion, the viceroy expressed his desire to see the amir's position strong and well established and offered his readiness to provide him with reasonable assistance.

Highly disappointed at the outcome of the meeting and feeling snubbed by the British, the amir reacted angrily, which was reflected in his unusually discourteous and cynical response to Lord Northbrook. He declined to receive a British officer at Kabul and left the subsidy of one million rupees untouched in the Peshawar treasury, but he disdainfully accepted the arms donation. Further, the amir vented his displeasure at two prominent British travelers by forbidding them passage through Afghanistan.

The Simla Conference marked a turning point in the relationship between Amir Sher Ali Khan and the British

government. In hindsight, the British missed a great opportunity of making Afghanistan a faithful friend and ally. As in the years leading up to the first Anglo-Afghan war, the lack of vision on the part of British policy makers led to the path of war, costing an enormous amount of blood and treasure with little to gain from it. The failure of the home government to embrace the practical suggestions of Viceroy Northbrook drove Amir Sher Ali Khan into an alliance with Russia at a very critical moment of the Great Game. General Roberts later wrote,

> I had several interesting conversations with Yakub [Yaqub] Khan, and in discussing with him Sher Ali's reasons for breaking with us, he dwelt on the fact that his father, although he did not get all he wished out of Lord Mayo, was firmly satisfied and content with what had been done for him, but when Saiyed Nur Mahomed returned from Simla in 1873, became thoroughly disgusted, and at once made overtures to the Russians, with whom constant intercourse had since been kept up.[22]

Three years later, under new geopolitical conditions in Central Asia and policy shifts in London, England felt the need to enter into a treaty with the amir of Afghanistan, but it was another time and a different situation, one not conducive to such arrangements as they were in 1873.

Shortly after arriving in India, Lord Lytton wrote to Amir Sher Ali Khan in April 1876 announcing his assumption of the viceroyalty and his intention to dispatch a mission to Kabul for the purpose of discussing certain matters of mutual interest. Embittered by his past unsuccessful efforts to win concrete security commitments from the British against potential Russian threats, Amir Sher Ali replied that all relevant issues had been discussed in 1873. He refused to receive a British envoy in Kabul, expressing fears of his security and concerns that this would induce Russia to send a mission as well. From this point on, the correspondence between the two sides is tainted with the increasing bitterness of a suspicious amir and an assertive viceroy motivated by the notion of a real Russian threat. Lytton, like

many supporters of the Forward Policy, entertained the idea of establishing advanced posts in Afghanistan along suitable defensive lines to enhance the British-Afghan capacity to contain the Russians at a line distant from India. This idea had shaped the policy of the Disraeli-Salisbury cabinet in 1876, which the prime minister called the “scientific frontier,” meaning securing a frontier that could be defended at a considerably lower cost than the actual North West Frontier of India.[23]

Unsatisfied by the amir’s response, the viceroy addressed the amir in a second correspondence informing him, in a tone of underlying threats, that the consequences of his refusal to receive the viceroy’s envoy would rest entirely on the government of Afghanistan, which he claimed would alienate itself from an alliance with a power that is offering a hand of friendship. The letter caused a lot of excitement in Kabul, to the point that the declaration of *Jihad* was mooted. This time coincided with the receipt of overtures from General Kaufman, the Russian governor of Turkistan. The amir delayed his response for six weeks and then, ignoring the viceroy’s proposal to send a mission to Kabul, merely suggested a few options for talks, including sending his envoy to India, a meeting of the two sides’ representatives on the border, or the return of the British native agent (*Wakil*) in Kabul, Nawab Atta Mohammad Khan, to India for talks with the viceroy. The final option was agreed upon, and the nawab arrived in Simla early in October 1876. During the negotiations, which lasted until April 1877, the nawab informed the viceroy of the amir’s disaffection, which had soured his relations with the British. Among Sher Ali’s main grievances, he listed the unfavorable British arbitration in the Sistan dispute; the failure of Sayed Nur Mohammad Shah’s mission to India in 1873, when it was the desire of the amir to enter into an offensive and defensive alliance with the British government; the interposition of Lord Northbrook’s government on behalf of Yaqub Khan, who had

been jailed by the amir for rebellion; the recent British deals with the chief of Kalat behind the amir's back; the British occupation of Quetta; the British transmission of presents through Afghanistan, to his vassal, the Mir of Wakhan, without the amir's permission; and, above all, the amir's conviction that the British policy was exclusively directed to the furtherance of British interests without any thought for those of Afghanistan.[24]

Lord Lytton replied that he was willing to enter into a treaty as sought by the amir and acknowledge the appointment of Abdullah Jan as Sher Ali's heir apparent under certain conditions. His pledges included that the friends and enemies of either state should be those of the other; that, in the event of unprovoked aggression upon Afghanistan from without, assistance should be afforded in men, money, and arms; and also that to strengthen the amir against such aggression, the British government was willing to fortify Herat and other points on the frontier and, if desired, to lend officers to train the army; and that a yearly subsidy should be paid to the amir. The conditions attached to these offers included the amir's desisting from the aggression or provocation of his neighbors and from entering into external relations without British knowledge. Further, the amir was required to decline all communication with Russia and refer her agents to British authorities, while British agents should reside at Herat and elsewhere on the frontier. Further, a mixed commission of British and Afghan officers was to determine and demarcate the amir's frontier. Other demands were making arrangements for the free circulation of trade on the principal trade routes as well as for the installation of a telegraph line between India and Afghanistan. Finally, Afghanistan was to become freely open to official and nonofficial Englishmen and provide for their safety.

The viceroy suggested that if the amir agreed to the conditions a treaty might be concluded between the representatives of the respective governments and ratified

either at Peshawar, by the amir meeting Lord Lytton there, or at Delhi if the amir accepted the viceroy's invitation to attend the Imperial Assembly in January 1877, where the queen would be declared the empress of India.

The amir declined to reply to the viceroy's proposals or to the invitation to attend the planned Imperial Assemblage in Delhi. And the *Wakil*'s mission, which lasted until April, ended inconclusively. The amir, however, agreed to send his prime minister, Said Nur Mohammad Shah, to Peshawar to discuss Lytton's proposals with Sir Louis Pelly, the intended envoy to Kabul. During the talks, which continued from January 30 to February 19, 1877, the Afghan minster indicated Kabul's absolute refusal to receive European officers anywhere in Afghanistan. The talks ended with the death of Sayed Nur Mohammad Shah on March 26, 1877. Lytton ordered Pelly to end the dialogue with Kabul and withdrew his agent, Nawab Atta Mohammad, from Kabul. A period of frigidity prevailed over the relations as a highly agitated Sher Ali declared that "it was not possible to come to terms, and that there was nothing left for him but to fight, that he had seven crores [70 million] of rupees, every one of which he would hurl at the heads of the English." The amir ended by giving orders for the proclamation of a *Jihad*.[25]

Obviously the conditions suggested by the viceroy amounted to the loss of Afghanistan's independence, something that the viceroy saw as an inevitable trend, given the location of Afghanistan between two strong and competing powers. He believed that Afghanistan was "a state far too weak and barbarous to remain isolated and wholly uninfluenced between two great military empires." Lytton compared the amir's position between the Russian and British empires with that of an "earthen pipkin between two iron pots." He stated that if the amir remained on good terms with the British, their military power "could be spread around him like a ring of iron and if he became our enemy, it could break him as a reed."[26] The viceroy admitted that the

disaffection of Sher Ali with the British was caused by the British neglect of him and he saw winning the amir back as a key security need for the British Empire. In spite of intermittent Russian advances in Central Asia, what constituted the main British concern was not so much the threat of a Russian invasion of Afghanistan but the potential of its alliance with Sher Ali, who would become “a tool” in the hands of Russia. “I will never allow him to become such a tool,” avowed Lytton, “it would be my duty to break before it could be used.”[27]

The “tool” was never used against the British but the viceroy and his higher-ups did try to break it. The whole drama turned into a test of wills between the two major powers, with Afghanistan serving as the arena. On the one hand, Russia’s opportunistic moves with retractable steps were more of a reconnaissance in force, and on the other hand, the paranoid British Indian leaders often reacted rashly at the expense of third parties. In the words of the Duke of Argyll, “the pride of possession and the instinct of dominion, like all other primary passions of the mind, are liable to irrational excesses and dangerous abuse. And never has this abuse been more signally illustrated than in the temper of mind which has been engendered in a very large section of English politicians. In particular, the jealousy and the fear of Russia have become a mania.”[28]

Meanwhile, in Europe the Russo-Turkish hostility over Turkey’s alleged oppression of its Christian subjects in Bulgaria led Russia to declare war on Turkey in April 1877. The war continued for a year. Expecting a confrontation with Russia in the Balkans, Britain moved a division of 5,000 native Indian soldiers to Malta. Russia retaliated with increased activity in Central Asia. Diplomatically, General Kaufman dispatched a Russian envoy of imperial ambassadorial level to the Kabul court for security talks. Militarily, he backed up the move by mobilizing three columns of some 15,000 men from Tashkent, Ferghana, and

Petro-Aleksandrovsk (on the lower Amu Darya) to advance and converge on the upper Amu Darya and establish cantonments by the ferries of Kilif and Kerki (on today's Afghanistan-Turkmenistan border). The situation sent waves of alarms from Kabul to Simla. Although the Russian columns were slowed and eventually stopped short of their goals due to a peace conference in Berlin, the Russian mission proceeded to Kabul. The Russian mission led by General Stolietov left Tashkent on May 22, 1878, which coincided with the opening of the Berlin Congress. The Russians hoped that the mission might influence the decision of the Berlin Congress,[29] although in response to the inquiries of the British government, the Russian imperial government at St. Petersburg denied the dispatch of such a mission either by the imperial government or by the Turkistan governor general. On the surface it looked like an initiative taken by General Kaufman with no direct involvement of the imperial government in the decision, but there were signs that the move was a political probe with the tacit approval of the Russian War Office aimed at targets of opportunity with no firm goals.

When Amir Sher Ali received the news that a Russian mission was headed toward Kabul, he called a traditional *Jirga* (tribal assembly) to decide which side Afghanistan should ally with in the highly contentious regional situation. The *Jirga* tilted toward making arrangements with Russia to offset the British pressure. On the eve of his arrival in Kabul, Stolietov received a note from General Kaufman informing him of the conclusion of the Peace Treaty of Berlin (signed on July 13, 1878) and instructing him not to make a serious commitment to the Afghan amir. The Stolietov mission arrived five miles from the capital of Kabul on July 22 to a warm and pretentious welcome by the foreign minister and was escorted by a large body of troops to the Bala-Hissar, where the next morning they were received in state by the amir and his high-ranking officials. In spite of Kaufman's

instructions not to get engaged in serious arrangements with the amir, and his knowledge of the signing of the peace accord at Berlin, Stolietov availed himself of the opportunity to produce a draft treaty offering Russian military assistance to the amir in the event that his country was invaded from outside. A text of the treaty between the Russian government and Amir Sher Ali Khan, as written from memory by Mirza Mohammad Nabi, reads, “The Russian Government engages that if any foreign enemy attacks Afghanistan, and the Amir is unable to drive him out, and asks for the assistance of the Russian Government, the Russian Government will repel the enemy, either by means of advice, or by such other means as it may consider proper.”[30] As the text refers to the death of the amir’s heir apparent, Abdullah Jan, which took place on August 17, the treaty must have been concluded after that date and before the departure of Stolietov from Kabul on August 24.

Frustrated by Amir Sher Ali’s hardball diplomacy, Lord Lytton, with authorization from London, saw the presence of the Russian envoy in Kabul as an opportune occasion to pressure Amir Sher Ali to immediately receive a British mission in Kabul. Sir Neville Chamberlain was named as the envoy. His agent, who was sent in advance to inform the amir, reached Kabul on August 17, 1878. This was the day that the amir’s favorite son and heir apparent, Abdullah Jan, died, and the amir was overcome by grief. He asked for a delay on the British proposal as he was in mourning, but he did continue his discussions with the Russian mission and his correspondence with Kaufman. Since the British did not receive a formal reply from the amir, Lytton proposed the immediate dispatch of Chamberlain with an escort of 1,000 men to Kabul. This was in spite of instructions from the secretary of state for India to wait for the receipt of a letter from St. Petersburg on the nature of the Russian interaction with Kabul, which was on its way to London. But before this letter reached India, frontier officers were already making

arrangements with the Afridi tribesmen of Khyber for the passage of the mission, a move that further infuriated the Afghan government.

Lytton waited one more week for the receipt of the letter and, when it did not arrive, he ordered Chamberlain to advance. Although the Russian envoy Stolietov had been recalled by his government from Kabul and there were no confirmed reports of the Russian union with the amir, the urgency showed by the viceroy in ordering his mission to proceed to Kabul was linked to Lytton's growing anti-Russian and anti-amir feelings. On September 21, the advance party of the mission, under Major Pierre Cavagnari, crossed the Afghan border, and it was stopped one mile east of Ali Masjid. The Afghan governor, Faiz Mohammad, treated the party courteously but firmly announced that he was under orders from the amir to stop the British mission and use force if needed. He also complained about the British dealings with the Khyber tribes who were the subjects of the amir. The situation forced Cavagnari to return to Peshawar.

In his communications with the home government, the viceroy requested permission to declare war. The situation triggered a stormy cabinet meeting where opinions were divided over Lytton's policy. Lord Salisbury, the foreign secretary, criticized it as recklessness, risking war with Russia just as "peace with honor" was achieved at Berlin, while Lord Cranbrook, secretary of state of India, endorsed it. In his long speech at Parliament, Cranbrook justified military intervention in Afghanistan. "The people saw us at the gates of Afghanistan demanding admittance; they saw us repulsed," he stated.

> What would be the effect on the Indian mind and Indian feelings? That is a matter of some importance to us the Imperial race who have to govern the country. They thought that we were hesitating too long, and that we were afraid; that there was something behind Afghanistan we durst not meet. This was in their minds, and if we had retired they would have been justified in supposing that such fears were entertained. We have no such fears and call upon you as we call upon the country, to support us in the policy we have

adopted for the safety, honor, and welfare of Her Majesty and her dominions.[31]

Thus in the end Lytton's policy prevailed. However, the home government instructed the viceroy to request in temperate language that the amir issue an apology, grant amnesty for the Khyber tribesmen who offered passage to the British mission, and accept a permanent mission. He was also directed to send an ultimatum to Sher Ali that if a satisfactory reply should not be received by November 20, hostilities would immediately begin. The ultimatum was sent on November 2, and the amir turned to Kaufman, who merely advised him to come to terms with the British.

Meanwhile, military preparations were expedited while planning to launch simultaneous invasions on three axes to advance through the Khyber Pass to Dakka, from the Kurram Valley to Piwar Kotal, and from Quetta to the Pishin Valley and on to Kandahar. As no answer was received from the amir, the northern column crossed the Afghan border on November 21, and the second Anglo-Afghan war began.

The Opposing Forces

In light of the experience of the first Anglo-Afghan war and technological advances, the British forces employed in the second Afghan war were suitably organized, better equipped, well served by the infrastructure, and better trained in mountain warfare. The British troops were armed with Martini-Henry rifles and native troops with Sniders. The former was a breech-loading single-shot rifle with an effective range of 400 yards and a maximum range of 1,900 yards. The weapon was of an 11.4-millimeter (0.450-inch) caliber with a rate of fire of 12 rounds per minute. The Snider was a single-shot side-hinged breech-block rifle of 14.7-millimeter (0.577-inch) caliber and a rate of fire of 10 rounds per minute. With its larger caliber the weapon's effective

range reached 600 yards and a maximum range of 2,000 yards. Other technological advances included the telegraph and the railroad terminals that reached the Afghan frontier at Jhelum and Sukkur. The medical service was improved but did not go below a system of regimental hospitals, backed by tactical aid stations and ambulances.

The Afghan army had also improved as a result of Sher Ali Khan's reforms in the 1870s when he restructured the military modeled on the British military organizational pattern. Building on his father's modernization and professionalization of the army, the amir introduced the British-Indian organizational system. During his 16-year reign (1863–1879), the amir continued to introduce improvements founded upon Anglo-Indian drill books, which he had had translated into Persian.[32] The army had adapted British tactical manuals and drill books that guided its action in battle. I have seen a military manual recovered at the battlefield of Kandahar (September 1880) by the British 66th Foot, which is a verbatim translation into Persian of the *British Officer's Pocket Book*.[33] The manual is now on display at the Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment Museum in Salisbury, England.

The Afghan regular army was structured in cavalry regiments (600 troopers each), infantry battalions/regiments (600 soldiers each), horse artillery batteries (150 men and six guns each), elephant artillery batteries (70 men, four guns, and two mortars each), mule and bullock artillery batteries (70 men and six guns each), and service elements. The army consisted of 62 infantry and 16 cavalry regiments, 22 horse artillery, two elephant artillery batteries, 16 mule mountain artillery batteries, and seven bullock artillery batteries. The regular army numbered 51,900 men.[34] The troops were armed with an assortment of weapons. The amir had received some 34,000 rifles with ammunition from British India, only 5,000 of which were breech-loading

Sniders and the others muzzle-loading muskets and rifled muskets. However, local models of Sniders and others were manufactured in Kabul. There were about 30,000 muskets and rifles of different types in the Kabul arsenal, which had the capability to manufacture guns, muzzle-loading and breech-loading rifles, gunpowder, and percussion caps and bullets. The artillery park was made up of 309 guns of different sizes, but only 24 of them were breech-loaders.[35]

The regular army was augmented by an irregular army, which, on the amir's books, numbered 24,000, and he had to pay their chiefs through whom they reported for service. It included 16,000 mounted and 8,000 foot levies but only one-fourth of them were actually kept up during the peacetime. During mobilization for war, however, an even larger number of irregular troops were called up and furnished by predesignated headman, chiefs of communities, and tribal leaders. Lists of all the able-bodied men capable of bearing arms were prepared in advance, and it was assumed that some 100,000 armed men could be assembled at Kabul without much difficulty. The army was deployed in eight garrisons across the country; half that number were based in Herat and northern Afghanistan (Afghan Turkistan).[36] The regular army was better trained and improved since the first Anglo-Afghan war in terms of their drill, discipline, arms, and uniforms.

Amir Sher Ali's army looked large on paper but it lacked sustainability for fighting drawn-out battles. It was organized into units, armed with relatively advanced weapons and clothed in distinct uniforms, often in imitation of the British Native regiments. Military spending constituted about one-quarter of the state revenue under Sher Ali, of which about 93 percent went to the payment of the soldiers and only 7 percent was spent on weapons, equipment, and uniforms.[37] The logistic system was ineffective and relied mostly on taxing the inhabitants of the area of operation to supply

provisions for the army. In general the regular army was well armed and decently equipped with pouch-belts and bayonet frogs similar to the English-style pattern. The cavalry were all furnished with new swords, slightly curved like those used by the British troopers. What was missing was the professional military culture that binds soldiers together and integrates the multiethnic military units into unified professional outfits.

The nascent military institution that Amir Sher Ali created mostly in 1870 had not reached the maturity of a professional army. It was miserably short of trained officers and effective leaders, which are the key to the development of discipline, morale, and esprit de corps. The units were practicing the usual drills of the time but did not receive sufficient and effective tactical training and firing practice. Hensman quoted one source in Kabul as saying each man only received three rounds of ammunition per year with which to gain knowledge of his Enfield and Snider weapons.[38] The situation caused the soldiers to miss their targets in combat, leading to a loss of confidence in their ability and a tendency to quit the battlefield. It was the main cause of the British breaking through the well-prepared defensive lines at Piwar, Jamrud, and Chaharasia. Thus the regular army lacked the capabilities of professional soldiers and had lost their indigenous tribal military prowess within the constraints of a military unit where the service was unpopular due to bad officers, forced enlistment, and poor and uncertain pay.

The British expected that during the time of war, most of the Afghan troops would either come over to them or else disperse. The troops did not defect to the enemy; however, they did disperse, only to return in different formations to fight the invaders. The soldiers fought better when they joined, individually or as a group, the country’s traditional tribal structures, which took over the war against the British invasion in 1879–1880. In the words of Howard Hensman, “In fact, the late Afghan campaign proved beyond doubt that the

Afghan ‘regulars’ had reached that most precarious stage where the men are in a transition state: not yet trained soldiers, but a mob led by strange officers whom they scarcely know, and whom they generally dislike because they are the direct means of imposing the irksomeness of discipline upon them.”

The Concept of the Operation

The way the British decided almost suddenly to go to war with the amir did not leave them much room for deliberate planning with a well-defined end-state. The Russian political and military maneuvers in Central Asia and Kabul and Amir Sher Ali’s refusal to allow the presence of British agents at key locations in Afghanistan to watch these Russian designs were the very issues that the British government wanted to deal with through diplomacy or war. Although the Russian envoy was recalled from Kabul after the British government protested to the court of St. Petersburg and the military columns ordered by General Kaufman to the Afghan border were halted short of their objectives, the Afghan government’s denial of passage to the British mission into its territory was a major embarrassment to the British Empire, denting its prestige in the eyes of its Indian subjects. So exactly what was the aim of war? A war to counter Russian inroads into Central Asia and its potential threat to India required the occupation of key cities of Afghanistan north and south of the Hindu Kush Mountains to establish a forward defensive line. Such an objective would necessitate the employment of a large army of at least 50,000 combat troops to control the area and many thousands more to secure the long lines of communication. Such an option was neither feasible nor sustainable, even after the occupation of the country. Punishing Kabul authorities for wounding British honor could have been achieved through the march of a

15,000-man army through the Khyber Pass and the deployment of another 10,000 men along the communication lines to destroy the Afghan military establishment and occupy Kabul, enforce regime change, and return to Peshawar after a campaign similar to the retribution operation of General Sir George Pollock in 1842. An invasion to seize part of the Afghan territory in the Kurram Valley and control of the Shutur-Gardan Pass overlooking the shortest distance to Kabul required the deployment and operation of a 10,000-strong force plus a division-sized unit to keep its line of communication open.

The decision to go to war envisioned a limited initial goal with open-ended contingencies. The initial aim was to create a political situation conducive to checking the Russian threat, weakening the Afghan regime, and forcing it to accept British demands, as well as restoring the prestige of the British Empire. The ways and means to achieve these goals were military operations on several fronts to destroy the military capacity of the Afghan government and seize control of key frontier areas short of the occupation of the country. The initial campaign was expected to place the British forces in a position that facilitated continued operations if the strategic situation so required. The scheme of the military operation was to launch simultaneous invasions on three operational axes, including one in the north through the Khyber Pass to Dakka, another in the center through the Kurram Valley, south of the Khyber, with the aim of seizing control of Piwar and Shutur-Gardan Passes, and a third in the south from Quetta into the Pishin Valley and a continued march to Kandahar after being reinforced by a division from Multan.

Taking note of the lessons from the first Anglo-Afghan war, much stronger columns with sufficient firepower were deployed to conduct the invasion. They included five divisions on the first operational line: two each on the northern and southern axes and one on the center. The frontline forces were backed up by two reserve divisions and

a separate allied detachment. On the northern axis, the Peshawar-Khyber column, under Lieutenant General Sam Browne, consisted of over 16,000 men with 48 guns. On the central axis, the Kurram Valley Field Force, under Major General Roberts, included about 6,500 troops with 18 guns; and in the south, the Quetta column, commanded by General Biddulph, numbered some 6,000 men with 18 guns. After General Donald Stewart with the Multan division joined the column, he was to take command of the whole southern force (12,800 men and 78 guns). A reserve division massed at Hassan Abdal and commanded by General Maude was to support the northern axis while another reserve division massing at Sukkur under General Primrose was to operate in support of the southern axis. The central axis under Roberts was supported by a contingent of the Sikh Feudatory States commanded by Colonel Watson and was assigned to secure the Kurram Valley Field Force. Each column included camp followers totaling about the same number of the combat forces or more. The commanding generals of the three axes were acting independently and were getting their orders from the Army General Headquarters.[39]

The Operation on the Khyber Axis

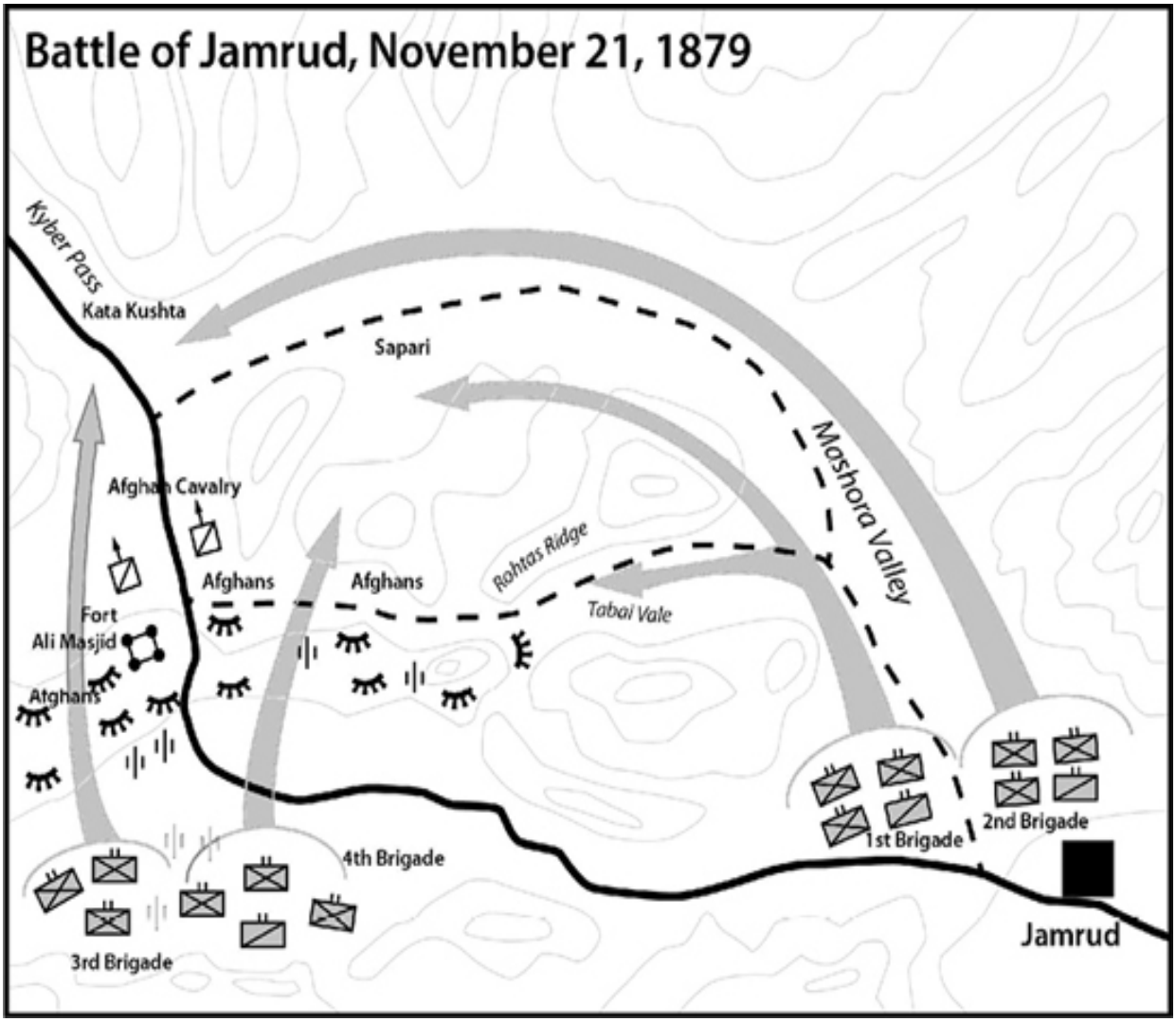
The operation on the Peshawar-Khyber axis was launched on November 21, 1878, by the 1st Division of the Field Force, comprising four infantry and one cavalry brigade. Each infantry brigade consisted of one European and two native regiments. The cavalry brigade included two European squadrons and two native regiments. An artillery battery was attached to each of the First and Second Infantry Brigades in addition to three more batteries under the command of the division. The force was backed by a reserve division at Hasan Abdal consisting of a cavalry brigade (one European and one

native regiment) and an infantry brigade (one European and three native regiments).

The Afghan defensive position on the axis was located at Ali Masjid, six miles east of the mouth of the Khyber Pass. It was strongly held by three to four infantry regiments and 200 horse (about 3,700 men) under the command of Ghulam Haidar Khan and Mir Akhor, with 24 guns placed inside the fort and on its surrounding hills. The position on both sides of the fort stretched across the valley from a fortified line on the right to the Rhotas summit on the left. General Browne considered the Afghans' position too strong to be overcome by frontal attack.

Following the traditional British tactics of an indirect approach in mountain warfare, the general decided to outflank the Afghan position on the right by moving the 1st and 2nd Infantry Brigades, under Brigadier Macpherson and Colonel Tytler respectively, through a circuitous route in the Gudar and Lashora Valleys, four miles to the east of the Khyber, to Sapri, with the 1st Brigade being ordered to detach en route a party of 400 rifles through the Tabai vale to the Rhotas ridge and then on arriving at Sapri to move southwest along the Rhotas ridge until it crowned the heights above and a little in the rear of Ali Masjid, where the Khyber Pass begins to open out and is about 100 yards wide. The 2nd Brigade was to take up its position near Kata Kushtia on the Pass.[40] The remainder of the division was to march by the main road into the Khyber Pass and launch the attack on the Afghan position at about 1:00 PM on November 21, when the ultimatum deadline passed. The flanking brigades needed more time to reach their objectives over the rugged terrain. It was estimated that the 1st Brigade would take nine hours and the 2nd Brigade eighteen hours to get to their assigned assault positions. In order to synchronize the action of the two columns, the 1st and 2nd Brigades left the assembly area at Jamrud, nine miles east of Ali Masjid, after sunset on November 20 to be on the assault position in time

on the following day when the attack from the front would be launched.



The Battle of Jamrud, November 21, 1879

The main column of the 1st Division, consisting of the 3rd and 4th Infantry Brigades, the cavalry brigade, and the artillery, under the overall command of Lieutenant General Sam Browne, moved out from camp at Jamrud at about 7:00 AM on November 21, crossed the Afghan frontier, and advanced on the Afghan position at Ali Masjid. The column passed through the Afghan security patrols, exchanging

shots with them, and reached the Shagai ridge at the mouth of the pass at about 11:00 AM. With the advance of the British column within artillery range, the Afghan guns opened up from the fort and surrounding heights. The British guns were brought up and responded to the fairly accurate fire of the Afghan guns on preregistered targets. The artillery duel continued for two hours, and while no news arrived about the progress of the flanking brigades, General Browne ordered an attack at 2:30 PM on the Afghan position by the 3rd Brigade on the left and the 4th on the right. The advance met a fierce resistance and during the two and a half hours of heavy fighting the Afghans held their own, repelling the advance along the front and inflicting heavy casualties on the British brigades. By 5:00 PM, seeing no hope of penetrating the Afghan defenses, General Browne called off the attack and ordered the brigades to retire. The British troops suffered heavily during the withdrawal, losing 16 killed and 34 wounded.

Meanwhile, the flanking brigades failed to reach the designated assault positions in time and were impeded by difficult terrain and exhaustion. Their move, however, alarmed the Afghan troops at Ali Masjid, who feared being encircled by the enemy. During the night of November 21, as the British forces regrouped to resume the attack on the following morning, the Afghan troops evacuated the Ali Masjid fort and its surrounding entrenchments and retired through the Bazar Valley and the Tsatsobay Pass to Besh-Bulaq in order to avoid being cut off by the British flanking columns in the Khyber Pass. Only a few Afghans who pulled out through the Khyber road were taken prisoner by the 2nd Brigade. The British found the Afghan defensive works at Ali Masjid extensive, well prepared, and formidable. The line could become impregnable with well-trained and better-disciplined troops that could make a better use of the terrain and secure the flanks of the position with flank security detachments.

After penetrating through the Khyber Pass, General Sam Browne advanced to Dakka without opposition and marched further west. On December 20, 1878, his forces camped on the plain of Jalalabad, where they stayed throughout the winter while the 2nd Division, under command of General Maude, kept open the line of communication through the Khyber Pass. Once the British forces established their camps, they came under constant attacks and harassment by the Afghan tribes launching raids on their outposts and hanging on the flanks of the enemy foraging parties. The situation forced the British command to conduct continuous security and punitive operations during the entire period of their deployment in the area. Following their traditional way of war against the occupying forces, most of the tribesmen had moved to their mountain hideouts with their moveable belongings and from there launched raids on the enemy. The punitive British destruction of the villages and forts on the plains had little effect on the mountain-based resistance fighters.

Operation on the Kurram Axis

On the Kurram operational axis, General Roberts, commanding the Kurram Valley Field Force, crossed the Afghan border at the Kurram River on November 21 and captured the forts in the valley vacated by the Afghan troops who were retiring to the Piwar Kotal (Pass) to hold a defendable position. Moving quickly through the valley, the British command initially coopted certain local tribes, particularly the Shi’a Turi clansmen, but as the preparation to attack the Afghan forces progressed, many of the chiefs suddenly left the British camp. Meanwhile, some Muslim soldiers within the British native regiments, including the Pashtuns, became hesitant to fight for the invading British army. General Roberts marched up the valley, reaching and

assembling the division at the Kurram Fort on November 27. There he received a report that the Afghan force under Mohammad Zaman Khan, which he expected to meet there, was retiring over the summit, abandoning its guns on the hither side of the Piwar Kotal.

Misled by erroneous intelligence, Roberts acted rashly by advancing his entire force in pursuit of the retiring enemy. In reality the Afghan troops were already in their fortified position on the summit of the Piwar Kotal.[41] After meeting stiff resistance from the Afghan forces near the pass, the division fell back a mile and then further moved back another mile during the night to get out of enemy artillery range. Two days later, after a more thorough reconnaissance, Roberts launched a masterly planned and ably executed operation to seize the strongly held Piwar Kotal.

The Battle of the Piwar Kotal

The Battle of the Piwar Kotal (Pass) at the opening of the second Anglo-Afghan war is recorded in the military history as one of the major tactical exploits of the British army under the tyranny of rugged terrain and the resolute resistance of the Afghan troops defending an ostensibly impregnable mountain stronghold. Located over 8,600 feet above sea level, the narrow defile is flanked by high pine-covered heights rising an additional 500 feet to the top. The pass connects Paktia Province in Afghanistan to the Kurram Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Area of Pakistan. It sits on the shortest route to Kabul through the Shutur-Gardan Pass and the Logar Valley. The access from the Kurram to the Kotal snaked through steep and craggy ascent with large stretches of rocks and boulders. The ascent was dominated throughout its entire length by high ground on both sides exposed to cannon and musket fire from well-prepared breastwork at the Kotal.

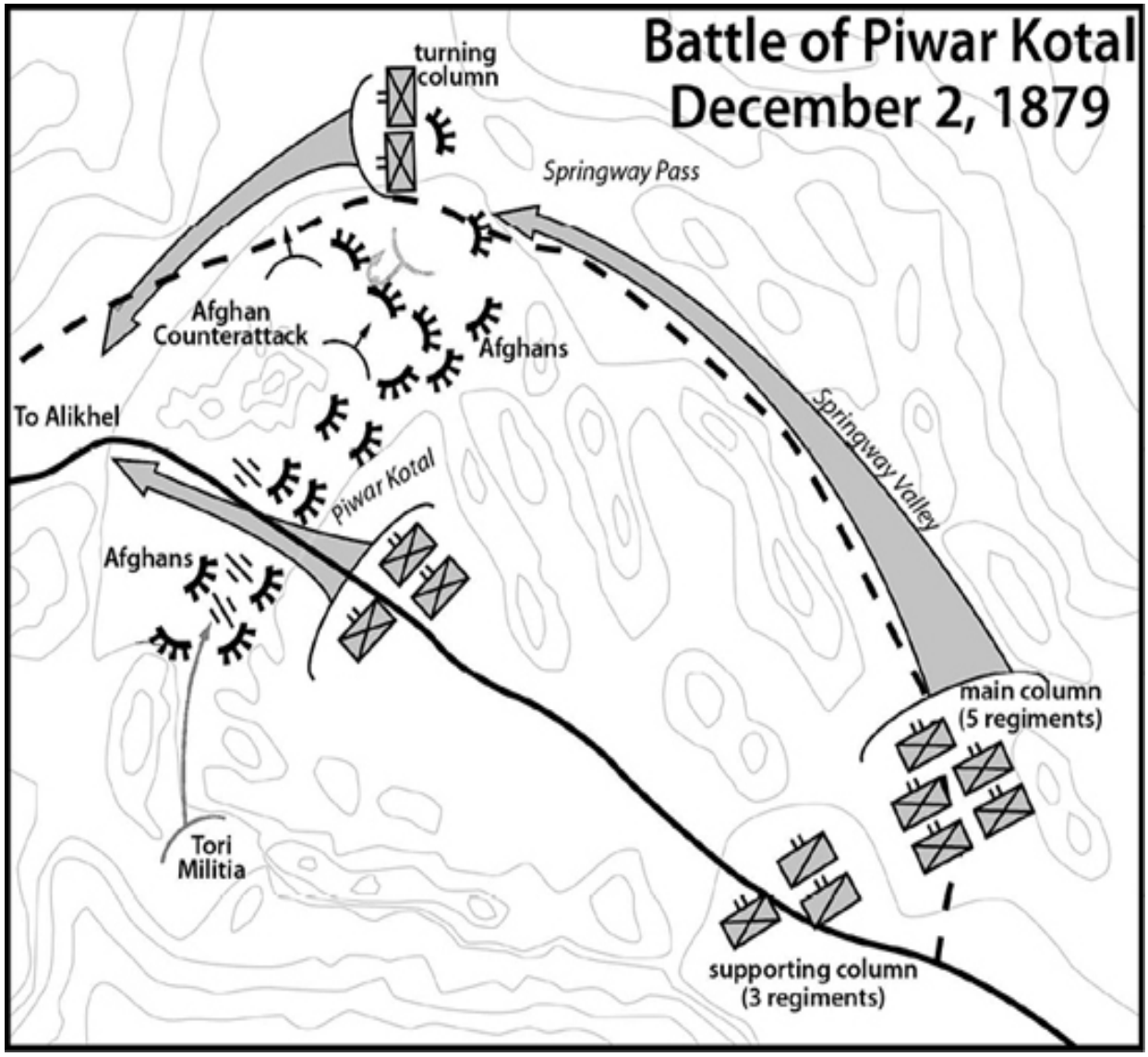
Expecting the British attack from the Kurram Valley, the Afghan army hastily covered the pass with some three regular infantry regiments (about 1,800 troops), which had lately arrived from Khushi in Logar, and 18 guns. An unspecified number of tribal militia and the *ghazis* were also at hand to boost the defenses. There were two roads that connected the Kurram District to Paktia across the mountains, one crossing the Piwar Kotal and the other through a side valley called Spingawai and a pass of the same name. The two roads intersected further west. The Afghans' defensive position extended from the Spingawai Pass to some commanding heights nearly a mile south of the Piwar Kotal, thus having a front of about four miles facing due east. From right to left the position ran along a lofty and rugged range of wooded mountains.[42] Toward the eastern side, the range was precipitous but descended on the west to a succession of upland meadows to the valley of the Hariab (Aryub), which was accessible by only two main roads —the Piwar and Spingawai Kotals. The Afghans' position, as it was later inspected by the British force, was described as of enormous natural strength and elaborate defensive dispositions.

A thorough survey of the line from different locations convinced General Roberts that the defenses at the Kotal were too strong to be taken by a frontal attack. On November 30, a reconnaissance party under Major Collett made an excursion up the side valley and found that the terrain there was less steep except at the summit of the Spingawai Kotal. The pass was not strongly held by the Afghans, and the valley was wide enough to accommodate the infantry column and the guns. The staff estimated that it would take four hours (excluding halts) for the infantry to move from camp to the Spingawai Kotal, and from there four more hours to get across the intermediate ridges to the Piwar Kotal. General Roberts calculated that if the turning force moved out at 10:00 PM on December 1, even with some

unforeseen delays, it could still reach the foot of the Spingawai Pass in the dark. On the basis of the reconnaissance assessments and the need to dislodge the Afghan forces before they received reinforcements, which were reportedly on the way from Kabul, General Roberts decided to launch a surprise attack on the Piwar Kotal by turning the left flank of the Afghan forces with a night advance through the Spingawai Kotal.[43] His concept of the operation was to launch a three-pronged advance on the enemy position, including a main flanking attack on the left, a frontal advance by a supporting column, and a diversionary probe through the mountain on the enemy right flank. Synchronized by time, the columns were to converge on the Afghans' position on the morning of December 2. The combat formation and task organization was structured accordingly.

The total available combat troops under General Roberts numbered 3,304 men, including 889 Europeans and 2,415 natives, with 13 guns. The force was grouped into two columns. The main turning force comprised one European regiment (72nd Highlanders) and four Native infantry regiments (2nd and 29th Punjab Infantry, 5th Gurkhas, 23rd Pioneers) with eight guns numbering 2,263 men. This column, commanded by General Roberts himself, with Brigadier General Thelwall acting as his deputy, was to move quietly at night and turn the left flank of the Afghan position on the Piwar Kotal. The supporting column under Brigadier General Cobbe comprised one European battalion (the 2–8th Foot) and two Native regiments (12th Bengal Cavalry and 29th Punjab Infantry) with five guns numbering about 1,000 men; the column was to remain in camp and advance at 6:00 AM on December 2 for a frontal attack to pin down the Afghan forces at the pass and be in position to storm the Piwar Kotal from the front when the Afghans' left flank had been sufficiently beaten by the turning force. Another smaller force of irregulars under Major Palmer was instructed

to launch a diversionary action in the mountains to the south of the Afghan positions on the Piwar Kotal.



The Battle of Piwar Kotal, December 2, 1879.

As part of the deception measures, the activities of the reconnaissance patrols toward the Piwar Kotal on both flanks were intensified, and gun batteries were positioned at places near the Teri Mangal village,[44] commanding the Kotal. These actions proved to be effective in misleading the enemy, as the Afghans began shelling the British batteries and placed

additional guns in position on the south side of the pass, indicating that they expected a frontal attack. Meanwhile, the plan to turn the Afghans' position through the Spingawai Kotal was kept secret until a few hours before the departure of the troops. "When it became sufficiently dark," wrote General Roberts, "to conceal our proceedings, all the commanding and staff officers assembled in my tent, and I disclosed to them my scheme for the attack, impressing upon them that success depended upon our being able to surprise the enemy, and begging of them not even to whisper the word 'Spingawi' to each other."[45]

At 10:00 PM on Sunday, December 1, General Roberts at the head of the turning force moved out of the camp in complete silence, heading first due east for two miles and then turning sharply to the north through the craggy valley. "Tents were left standing and camp-fires burning," wrote Roberts,

> and so noiselessly were orders carried out that our departure remained unsuspected even by those of our own people who were left in camp. . . . The track . . . entered a wide gorge and ran along the bed of a mountain stream. The moonlight lit up the cliffs on the eastern side of the ravine, but made the darkness only the more dense in the shadow of the steep hills on the west, underneath which our path lay, over piles of stones and heaps of glacier debris. A bitterly cold wind rushed down the gorge, extremely trying to all, lightly clad as we were in anticipation of the climb before us. Onward and upwards we slowly toiled, stumbling over great boulders of rock, dropping into old water-channels, splashing through icy streams, and halting frequently to allow the troops in the rear to close up.[46]

On the way to the kotal the silence was suddenly broken by the sound of a shot fired by a member of the Pashtun companies within the 29th Punjab Regiment, which was leading the column. A few seconds later a second shot echoed through the silent night. It was suspected that the Pashtun soldiers deliberately sent the signal to their Afghan kinsmen of the approaching enemy. General Roberts ordered one company of the 72nd Highlanders and the 5th Gurkhas

to the front and gave instructions to closely watch the Pashtun soldiers.

By the first streak of dawn, sudden firing from the high ground into the column indicated that the column was at the foot of the Spingawai Kotal. Following their preissued instructions, the Gurkha and the Highlander companies in the front fixed bayonets and without hesitation charged up the slopes while the mountain artillery battery came into action. After clearing the first line, the Gurkhas and Highlanders pushed forward and dislodged the Afghan defenders from the second position 200 yards higher up on the slope below the pass. Without halting there, the attacking companies advanced upward and charged the third line of defense right on the kotal, which led to the seizure of the Spingawai Kotal, where the small Afghan detachment left their gun and were unable to save it under the pressure of pursuing enemy troops. Although the British forward elements were in possession of the pass, crowds of Afghan soldiers dressed in uniforms similar to the British units were threatening the shaky foothold of the enemy from the heavily wooded surroundings. Only the arrival of troops from the rear saved the British position by engaging the Afghan troops with a withering fire of Snider rifles, forcing them to fall back on the Piwar defenses. At sunrise, the British column was in control of the Spingawai Kotal, but it was at a significant distance from the main Afghan position on the Piwar Kotal.

The second phase of the operation was supposed to reduce the Afghans' position on the Piwar Kotal by launching a flanking attack, but it faced serious complications. The Spingawai position was captured relatively easily since the weakly held line was surprised by an overwhelming British column that suddenly emerged on their flank.

Contrary to expectations, the terrain from Spingawai Kotal to the Piwar Pass was not one extended ridge but was intersected by deep ravines. The intervening ridges to the

kotal were heavily wooded and defended by mobile detachments of Afghan forces. The advance was further hampered by the separation of the British units within the column due to the closed terrain condition. General Roberts regrouped his troops on a grassy plateau behind the Spingawai Kotal, after the left-behind units closed up and the regiments who were pursuing retiring Afghans rejoined the force. Then the column pushed on.

This, however, coincided with a spirited Afghan attack, charging the column down the hill and trying to force their way into the British position. The British mountain guns were quickly brought into action, and under their cover the British launched another attack to drive the Afghans from their position. But the attempt failed after significant casualties. The Afghans' position could only be reached over a narrow causeway, which was swept by direct fire and cross fire and obstructed by trunks of trees and a series of barricades. The situation convinced Roberts that the enemy could not be cleared out of their entrenchments by direct attack without entailing heavy losses, which he could ill afford and was most anxious to avoid.[47]

This opened the third phase in the operation, in which General Roberts decided to launch another flanking thrust to turn the enemy position. On the right, he discovered a way to turn the Afghans' position on the hill that had defeated the British attack and get almost to the rear of the Piwar Kotal itself to threaten the enemy's retreat from that position. Meanwhile, the 1st Brigade launched a frontal attack on the Afghan position early in the morning, with its artillery targeting the Afghan guns. The infantry advanced up the steep mountain side within 1,400 yards of the kotal, only to be hampered by the difficult terrain and to be met by such a destructive fire that Brigadier General Cobbe was severely wounded and the troops could not advance further.

General Roberts saw the turning movement not only as the key to forcing the enemy to abandon his entrenched position

on the kotal but also as a move to facilitate the advance of the 1st Brigade from the front and flank maneuver of Colonel Palmer and his allied Turi tribesmen on the right of the enemy disposition. Therefore, after consolidating his gains on the Spingawai Kotal and extending his lines to the south, Roberts initiated his turning movement. As the Afghan troops saw that their rear was threatened, they began retiring before their retreat could be cut off. The situation slackened their artillery fire, opening the way for the British Cavalry Brigade under Hugh Gough and the Palmer detachment to approach and converge on the pass. Gough later wrote, “We certainly had not driven them from such a position, so we could only conjecture that Roberts’s flank attack had defeated the enemy, who, threatened on one side and attacked on the other, had fled in such haste that everything was left behind them.”[48] After evacuating their stronghold, the Afghan troops retreated using the Ali Khel road to Paktia, abandoning their artillery park and baggage. Following a few days of rest and logistic arrangements, General Roberts moved to Ali Khel from where he inspected the Shutur-Gardan Pass.

Roberts’s efforts to set up a pro-British administration in Khost got entangled in tribal rivalries and the anti-British mood of the hill tribes. His orders were to take control of Khost, which lies directly south of Kurram, as part of the Kurram Field Force objective. The area was home to some of the most independent and turbulent frontier tribesmen. Although the Afghan governor at Matun, which was the district capital, surrendered the Matun fort, large hordes of the hill tribes gathered and launched spirited attacks on the *Farangi* newcomers. Roberts’s reaction was the ruthless massacre of the rebellious tribes, destruction, and setting fires to their villages. He was severely censured for the excesses of his troops, which he considered justified under the circumstances. “This was an act of retributive justice, which I considered necessary for the due safety of the troops

under my command," he wrote, "and I submit that both the circumstances of the time and the subsequent result fully justified the action which I judged it necessary and prudent to take. The punishment was not inflicted without consideration and discrimination; no villages were burned which had not made common cause with the enemy against us."[49] But still Roberts was unable to empower a proxy administration in Khost with the help of local *Maliks*. His forces were insufficient to "take possession of Khost," as he was instructed. On January 27 the force began its return march and reached Kurram on February 4, 1879. After camping there for the winter, at the end of March the Kurram Force was ordered to a forward concentration area at Ali Khel. The column reached its new location in the third week of April. With the provision of adequate transport and supplies, General Roberts was in full readiness to march on Kabul.

The Southern Axis

On the southern axis, the march on Kandahar, with two divisions under the command of General Stewart, was smooth and easy with no serious opposition. The columns traversed much longer distances than those covered by the forces on the two other axes. Although the column had to surmount terrain barriers across the barren deserts of northern Baluchistan and make passage through the treacherous defiles of Bolan, Gwaga, and Kozhak, the march was mostly uneventful. General Stewart rode into Kandahar on January 8, 1879, through the Shikarpur Gate and the troops encamped outside the Kabul Gate on the adjacent plain. The Afghan governor Mir Afzal Khan, having disarmed the two infantry battalions of the garrison, fled toward Herat with only 200 horsemen and was accompanied by all the

officials of the city except the deputy governor, who handed over the town to General Stewart.

The Kandahar Field Force faced two immediate challenges: the supply of provisions by tapping into the limited local resources and the expansion of its influence beyond the urban centers. The first challenge they dealt with by making continuous foraging drives; the second they tried to accomplish through a series of active reconnaissance missions. Maintaining a large force in Kandahar with limited supply resources and no immediate prospects of major military operations was seen, however, more as a problem than a necessity. In spite of occasional harassment and hit-and-run attacks by the Durranis in Helmand and Kandahar and those of the Ghilzais in Qalat, the concentration of two divisions was considered oversaturation. Their line of communication was long and vulnerable to attacks, the transport means were inadequate, and the scarcity of local resources was pushing the large force to the verge of starvation.

The new orders called for General Stewart to retain a strong division of all arms in Kandahar, Quetta, and Pishin while the remaining troops, under command of General Biddulph, should march east of the Pishin Valley. At the end of August 1879, following the Treaty of Gandamak between the British and the Afghan amir Yaqub Khan, detailed orders were issued to return the South Afghanistan Field Force to India. The evacuation actually began on September 1, when the retrograde was suddenly stopped by the news of an outbreak in Kabul on September 3 and the massacre of the British resident and his escort there.

Amir Sher Ali’s Reaction

The fall of Ali Masjid and the Piwar Kotal had a domino effect in the disintegration of the Afghan regular army. With an

intention to go north in quest of Russian assistance against the British invasion, Amir Sher Ali Khan freed his son Yaqub Khan from jail on December 13, 1878, and appointed him his regent before leaving Kabul. On December 23, Sher Ali wrote to the British government that he was heading to "St. Petersburg, the capital of the Tsar of Russia, where, before a congress, the whole history of the transactions between myself and yourselves will be submitted to all the Powers of Europe."[50] But the international situation was hardly in favor of the ill-fated amir's expectations of help from the Congress of Europe (Berlin) or the tsar's government.

When the amir, accompanied by the remaining members of the Russian mission, arrived in Mazar-i-Sharif on his intended travel to St. Petersburg, he soon found that he had been used as a tool by Russia in its competition with the British. In response to his letter to General Kaufman for the promised assistance, the latter wrote to him on December 25, 1878, that "the Emperor has caused the British Government to agree to the continuance of Afghan independence. . . . For the present, come to terms with the British Government. Do not leave the soil of Afghanistan at this time, because it will be of benefit to you. My words are not without truth, because your arrival in Russian territory will make things worse."[51] Some three weeks later, on January 17, 1879, the amir received the most disappointing correspondence from Kauffman in response to his request for troops. The Russian general flatly rejected sending troops to the amir's assistance and merely spoke of "perpetual friendship!" "I have received an order from the Emperor," he wrote, "to the effect that it is impossible to assist you with troops now. I hope you will be fortunate. It all depends on the decree of God. Believe me, that the friendship which I made with you will be perpetual."[52] The amir did not survive long to see what that "perpetual friendship" really meant. In extreme despair, the physically and mentally failing amir

refused food and medicine and died at 56 on February 21, 1879.

The death of Amir Sher Ali Khan and the uncertainty surrounding the rule of his son Yaqub Khan provided the British with the difficult question of how to deal with Afghanistan after their initial military victories. Although the cohesiveness of the Afghan army was seriously damaged, the occupation of the country, in light of the British experience of 1839–1842, was not a preferred choice. For a while, the viceroy even toyed with the idea of breaking Afghanistan into separate principalities under pro-British governors. The idea, however, was rejected by the home government. Meanwhile, opposition to a costly and potentially devastating war gained momentum among the Liberal electoral blocks in Britain, particularly after the massacre of a large column of British and colonial troops at Isandlwana on January 22, 1879, by the army of the Zulu king in Africa.[53] There were even suggestions of unilaterally ending the war. So, when, on February 26, Amir Yaqub Khan wrote to the British political officer with the Peshawar Column announcing the death of his father and offering peace and friendship overtures, the viceroy jumped on the opportunity. About three months later, on May 26, 1879 (4th of Jamadi-ul-Sani 1196 AH), at Gandamak, the amir of Afghanistan and Major Cavagnari, representing the British government, signed the fateful treaty known as the Treaty of Gandamak, which was ratified by the Viceroy Lord Lytton four days later.

The Treaty of Gandamak

In the 10-article pact, Amir Yaqub Khan agreed, along with the peaceful management of bilateral issues, “to conduct his relations with foreign States in accordance with the advice and wishes of the British Government.” The treaty stipulated

that “the Amir will enter into no engagements with foreign states, and will not take up arms against any foreign state, except with the concurrence of the British Government.” On these conditions, the British government pledged “to support the Amir against any foreign aggression with money, arms or troops, to be employed in whatsoever manner the British government may judge best for this purpose.” The amir also agreed that a British representative shall reside at Kabul with a suitable escort and the British government “shall have the right to depute British agents with suitable escorts to the Afghan frontiers whensoever this may be considered necessary.” Both agreed that a telegraph line from Kurram to Kabul would be constructed and funded by the British and protected by the amir.

One of the controversial articles related to the territorial control of key Afghan locations by the British. Although the British government restored the towns of Kandahar and Jalalabad and all the territory occupied by the British armies to the amir, it retained the administrative control of Kurram, Pishin, and Sibi but without considering them as permanently severed from the limits of the Afghan kingdom. The British made the commitment that the “revenues of these districts, after deducting the charges of civil administration, shall be paid to His Highness the Amir.” Further, the treaty allowed the British government to retain in its own hands the control of the Khyber and Michani Passes, between Peshawar and Jalalabad, and direct dealing with “the independent tribes of the territory directly connected with these passes.” Finally, the British government agreed to pay to the amir and to his successors an annual subsidy of six lakhs of rupees (60,000 pound sterling).

With the Treaty of Gandamak, the first phase of the second Anglo-Afghan war drew to a close. The treaty ostensibly provided British India with a buffer against potential threats to the Indian frontier and may have satisfied the proponents of the “scientific frontier,” but it also charged the British

government with the serious responsibility of defending Afghanistan against aggression. Given the nature of the rugged terrain of the country and the independence of the Afghan people, the nation had the potential to become a serious barrier to outside aggression anyway. The British stated obligation to assist the Afghan amir with troops could pull the British into war with Russia, which was unlikely to be a policy choice for Britain. So it was clear that the British promises were mostly vague commitments subject to escapable interpretation under actual situations. No doubt, the pledges were used to sweeten the deal that Lytton was seeking to close for some time, and now there was the opportunity to see it become a reality through partnership with an awed and diffident amir. As Hanna later wrote Lytton,

> [Lytton] could afford to be indifferent to the distaste which they had inspired in the man [Yakub], on whom he had imposed them. Nor does he appear to have had any misgivings as to the feelings of the Afghan people in respect of the practical transfer of a portion of their country to a foreign power, and of the approaching advent of British officers in their midst. He had Cavagnari's assurance that in Afghanistan "so long as we have wealth and strength on our side, we shall always be able to count on having plenty of supporters."[54]

The treaty, however, did not end the war but in fact intensified it.

On the ratification of the treaty, the British forces on the Peshawar and Kurram axes immediately began withdrawal into the newly agreed frontiers. The retirement of the Kandahar Field Force was delayed because of health concerns until the autumn. The 1st Division of the Peshawar Valley Field Force left the Gandamak camp in early June and, despite exposure to temperatures ranging from 110–115°F in the shade and the widespread incidence of cholera, retired from the amir territory in four bodies, completing their withdrawal by the end of June 1879. On June 21, Sir Sam Browne reported to the commander in chief that the 1st Division of the Peshawar Valley Field Force was broken up. Soon afterward, Major Cavagnari, who had been selected as

“the Envoy and Plenipotentiary to the court of the Amir of Kabul,” left Simla on July 6, 1879, and arrived on July 15 at Thal on the British frontier. From there he was escorted by Major General Roberts and a small force of all arms to the Shutur-Gardan Pass on his way to Kabul. Roberts wrote later,

> As we ascended, curiously enough, we came across a solitary magpie, which I should not have noticed had not Cavagnari pointed it out and begged me not to mention the fact of his having seen it to his wife, as she would be sure to consider it an unlucky omen. . . . Nevertheless, I could not feel happy as to the prospects of the Mission, and my heart sank as I wished Cavagnari good-bye. When we had proceeded a few yards in our different directions, we both turned round, retraced our steps, shook hands once more, and parted for ever.[55]

A month later, on July 24, Cavagnari rode into the Bala-Hissar of Kabul accompanied by his secretary, William Jenkins; Dr. Ambrose Kelly, the medical officer of the embassy; and Lieutenant Hamilton, commanding the small body of 75 soldiers of the Guides.[56] Six days later Cavagnari wrote, “I personally believe that Yakub Khan will turn out to be a very good ally, and that we shall be able to keep him to his engagements.” He had spoken too soon.

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6 The Second Phase of the Second Anglo-Afghan War

1879–1881

In the first phase of the second Anglo-Afghan war, the British military defeated or overran Afghanistan border defenses, which were manned mostly by regular army units. They advanced on three axes but stopped short of marching on Kabul. The military action was used to force the Afghan government into a peace settlement on British terms. The rapid development of the events over fewer than six months took the Afghans by surprise with no time to mobilize their traditional means of popular response against the invasion. Meanwhile the death of the powerful Amir Sher Ali and accession of his irresolute son Yaqub Khan, created a lapse of leadership, causing indecisiveness and confusion. The Afghan sources indicate that four years of imprisonment in his father's jail had extremely cowed Yaqub Khan, who was once an exacting prince. Now his eyesight was weakened and his judgment and faculties had deteriorated.[1] As the humiliating conditions imposed on Afghanistan by the Treaty of Gandamak found wider circulation across the country, public resentment began to simmer wide and deep throughout the defiant land. The army was demoralized and unpaid for months, military

and civil officials were concerned about the uncertain future, and dissident parties were tempted to seize the opportunity to stir up people to revolt against the new leadership. The commander in chief Daud Shah Khan was displeased about the situation but incompetent to take action. The anti-British sentiments instilled in the Afghan psyche since the first Anglo-Afghan war were reinvigorated by the presence of the *Farangi Ilchi* and his bodyguards.

Since Kabul, Kandahar, and Jalalabad were under British influence, Herat in the west became the center of anti-British agitation. Sardar Ayub Khan (1857–1914), Amir Sher Ali's younger son and full brother of Yaqub Khan, had returned from exile and was appointed by Yaqub as the governor of the province of Herat. The sardar's anti-British feelings strongly inspired the army of Herat. When six regiments of them arrived in Kabul in the beginning of August, they could hardly hide their intense anti-English hatred when they found the *Farangi* soldiers in the capital. Headed by their officers, they marched the streets of Kabul, shouting against the British presence, abusing the envoy by name, and provoking quarrels with the British escort troops. They also abused the alleged Qizil-Bash accomplices of the British and warned them to take action against the *Farangis*. When one of the envoy's men who had witnessed the Afghans' demonstration warned him about the Afghan troops' hostile outbursts, the newly knighted Sir Cavagnari dismissed the concerns, saying, "Never fear; keep up your heart. Dogs that bark do not bite." To which he quipped, "These dogs do bite," and stated that there was real danger. "They can only kill the three or four of us here, and our deaths will be well avenged," said the envoy.[2]

Just one month later, Sir Louis Cavagnari was dead, his residence burned down, and the members of his mission massacred by angry Afghan soldiers who ostensibly were irritated over their unpaid arrears of many months' duration. It all happened suddenly on September 3, 1879, when some

unarmed Afghan regiments walked into Bala-Hissar to receive their pay. Their pay was partially paid,[3] but their demand for the arrear due to them was rejected by Daud Shah, who intended to provoke the angry mob against the British by stating that they should ask the British envoy for the rest of their dues, as he was running the country.[4] The agitated soldiers refused to take what was offered to them in protest and rushed to the residency, which was about 100 yards away. While the growing mob surrounded the residency, the envoy tried to calm them, but then his guards fired a few shots, causing fatalities among the protesters.[5] At this point, the soldiers hastened to get weapons by looting the Bala-Hissar arsenal and then returned to the residency. By 9:00 AM, the British mission was besieged by the soldiers and a growing mob of Kabul civilians who hurried to join the mutinous servicemen. Cavagnari sent a message to the amir for help, and the amir sent General Daud Shah to reason with the rioters. The general was somewhat sympathetic to the demands of the dissenting soldiers, and his half-hearted peace-making efforts failed to impress the mob. He was stoned and dismounted but not harmed. During the heavy fighting at the residency, the Guides[6] sallied out four times to drive the crowd away, each time losing more men.[7] By the evening the envoy Cavagnari with his members of the mission were massacred and the residence burned.

The event was similar to what took place about 38 years before on about the same day in Ramadan,[8] which caused the death of Alexander Burnes and his staff in Kabul. At that time, however, there was a British division based in Kabul, while in 1879, most of the three British operational columns in Afghanistan had retired or demobilized following the Treaty of Gandamak. The forces on the Peshawar axis under Sam Browne were broken up, while on the southern axis General Stewart commanded a small body of troops based in

Kandahar. The Kurram Field Force was the only grouping that was in a position to rapidly advance on Kabul.

The decision to march on the Afghan capital to avenge the massacre of the British mission and restore the prestige of the empire was made swiftly and decisively. A division under Major General Bright would occupy Jalalabad, and all available troops under Major General Sir D. Stewart would reoccupy Kandahar and threaten Ghazni if necessary. The Kabul Field Force, a division commanded by Major General Sir F. Roberts, comprised one brigade of cavalry under Brigadier General Massy (one European and three Native cavalry regiments), the 1st Infantry Brigade under Brigadier General Macpherson (one European and two Native infantry regiments), and the 2nd Brigade under Brigadier General Baker (one European and four Native infantry regiments), totaling 7,500 men of all ranks, with 6,000 camp followers. The division would immediately advance on Kabul over the Shutur-Gardan Pass. Meanwhile, the remainder of the Kurram Force, comprising the 3rd and 4th Brigades (each of which consisted of one European and three Native infantry regiments), was ordered to remain on the Shutur-Gardan, to hold the pass and secure the line of communication through the Kurram Valley.

In a letter to the viceroy, Amir Yaqub Khan expressed his regrets at the massacre of the British envoy and his entourage and lamented his inability to save them. While the Kabul Field Force was assembling on its axis during the second half of September, the amir dispatched his two top ministers, Vizier Shah Mohammad and Mustawfi Habibullah Khan, to Roberts’s camp in Ali Khel. They arrived on September 23, and during three days of talks they conveyed the message of the amir asking the British not to advance on Kabul but to leave the Afghan authorities to punish the mutineers. But the day after their arrival, General Baker’s advance party (part of his brigade) started moving down from the Shutur-Gardan through Dobandi and over the

Shinkai Kotal Pass to Khushi, which he reached the same evening, securing the entrance into the Logar Valley. The remainder of the brigade joined him on the two following days. On September 27, General Roberts moved his divisional headquarters from Ali Khel to the Shutur-Gardan and a day later camped at Khushi, where he found Amir Yaqub Khan with his eldest son, several sardars, a party of 45 persons, and an escort of 200 men who had arrived in General Baker's camp a day earlier. Once again the amir was trying to talk the general into delaying the advance, citing the enormous loss of lives, the destruction of property, and the suffering of innocent people including women and children if the army entered the city. Suspecting that the amir's real motive was to delay the British operation while mobilizing resistance against the British, Roberts only promised that arrangements would be made to protect the innocent. The amir stayed with Roberts's headquarters during the advance on Kabul but did not stop receiving visitors from the capital, probably including his uncle, Sardar Nek Muhammad, the chief commander at Kabul, who was making preparations to block the British entry into the capital.

Harassing attacks on the British column's rear elements in the Logar Valley notwithstanding, the whole column, except the rear guard under General Macpherson, which was assigned to protect the line of communication, reached Chaharasia, 11 miles south of Kabul, on October 5, 1879. The force bivouacked for the night there. Meanwhile, Sardar Wali Muhammad, a representative of Dost Muhammad's family and a member of the anti–Yaqub Khan faction joined Sir Roberts's camp and remained an ally of the British occupation forces, earning the dubious title of "Lotti" by the Afghans, which denotes the accomplice of the "Lords." On October 3, exactly a month after the destruction of the British residency in Kabul, General Roberts issued a proclamation to the people of Kabul warning against resisting

the British entry into the capital and that if resisted it would be seized by force. The proclamation assured that no harm would come to those who had not taken part in the murder at the British Embassy. “All persons found armed in or about Kabul will be treated as enemies of the British Government,” the proclamation said.

Early on October 6, the British command sent out reconnaissance parties along three access roads to Kabul, including the main road through the Sang-i-Nawishta gorge, five miles from General Robert’s camp at Chaharasia. The general intended to force the Afghan position in the Sang-i-Nawishta gorge, which was the shortest road to the city. British cavalry patrols were fired upon and were forced to retire. Afghan regular troops had taken up positions along a three-mile front stretching over the hills along both shoulders of the gorge from the east to the Chahar Dehi Valley in the west. Later estimates stated that the Afghan forces included up to 13 infantry regiments with a nominal strength of about 5,000 to 6,000 troops on the hill immediately to the west of the gorge. They were reinforced with 12 mountain guns while four Armstrong guns blocked the front of the Sang-i-Nawishta gorge. The main position of the Afghans was on the elevated ridge directly to the west of the Sang-i-Nawishta. About this time, further reports stated that the road to the rear of the British column was blocked by the Afghan armed men and that the march of General Macpherson’s brigade, with its long chain of baggage trains, would be opposed. Meanwhile, in the hills on both sides of General Roberts’s camp bodies of men assembled, waiting for nightfall to make a general attack upon the encampment.[9]

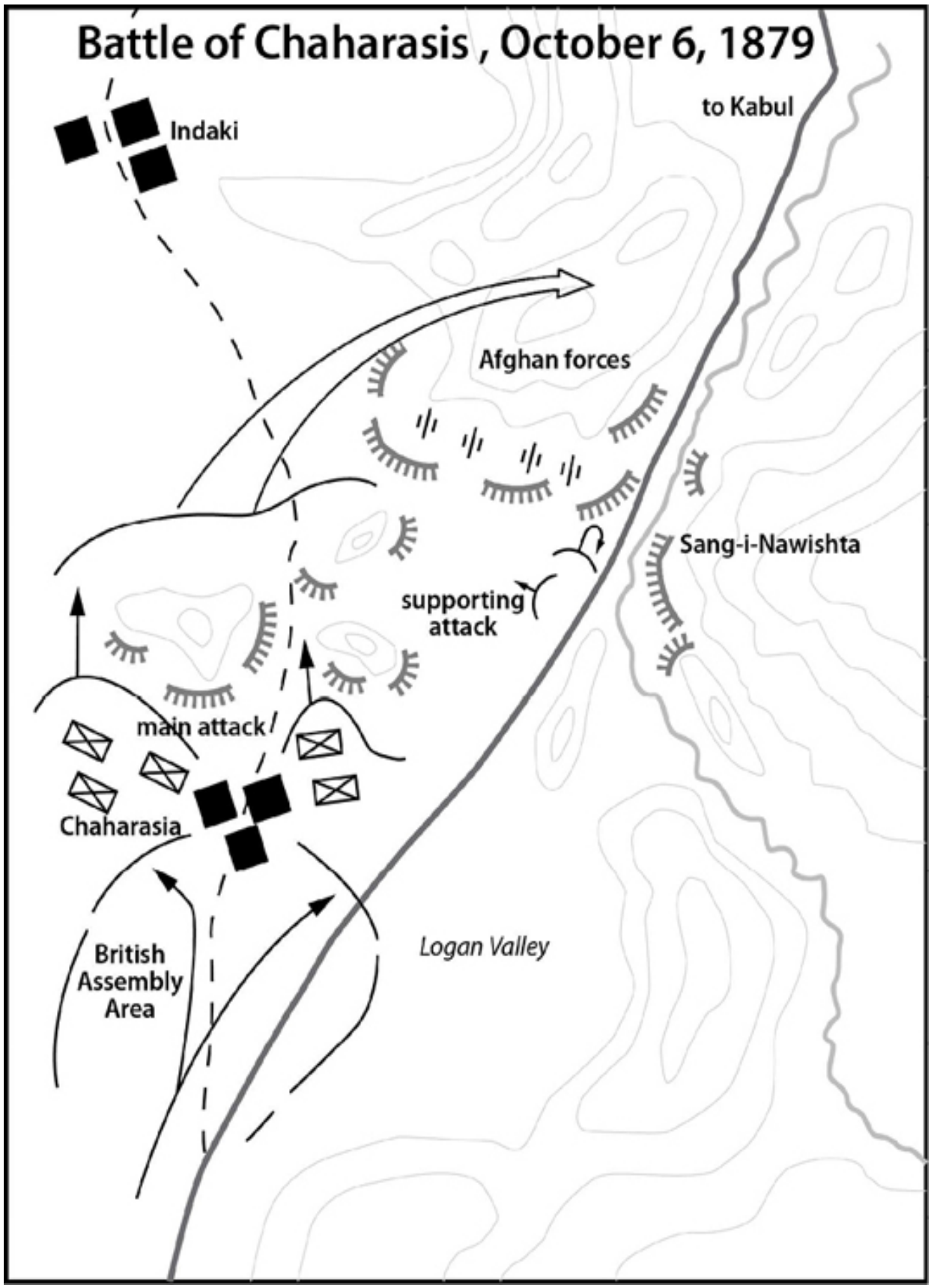
Time was the key factor. The longer the Afghan forces were allowed to hold the hills, the more fighters would join them. Waiting even one day could expose the British camp to night attacks. Under these circumstances, General Roberts decided to attack without waiting for the rest of his forces to close up. The Afghan forces under Sardar Nek Mohammad

Khan, the amir's uncle, expected the British main thrust to come on his left flank at the Sang-i-Nawishta gorge. Therefore, his main position was on the elevated ridge directly to the west of the Sang-i-Nawishta. The position was seen as so strong that it could only have been carried with heavy losses. Therefore General Roberts decided to launch the main attack with an outflanking movement upon the right of the Afghans' position while containing the enemy's left with a detachment commanded by Colonel Currie, including elements of the 72nd Highlanders and 23rd Pioneers, a reinforced cavalry squadron, and two guns. Roberts ordered Brigadier General Baker (with one European and two Native infantry regiments, a detachment from a Native cavalry regiment, a company of sappers and miners, and four guns) to launch the flanking attack to dislodge the Afghan troops from their positions on the hill.

The troops under General Baker assembled in the wooded enclosures of Chaharasia and advanced close to the left of the village under the cover of the outbuildings adjacent to the villages, and at about 11:30 AM they emerged into the open and were immediately engaged by a large number of the inhabitants of the Chahar Dehi villages, supported by a considerable force of the Afghan regulars that had occupied the hills overlooking Chaharasia. In a bold maneuver, the brigade turned the right flank of the Afghan position and fought its way to ascend the hill crest and then advance along the hill line toward the main Afghan position at Sang-i-Nawishta to the right. As the Afghan troops retired, the British regiments captured 12 mountain guns, which had been abandoned. Meanwhile, the pressure from the main road against the gorge forced the Afghans to make a hurried retreat. As darkness was fast approaching, the British attempted no further pursuit. The attacking columns were content to hold the ground by establishing piquets and occupying both ends of the Sang-i-Nawishta defile. The main body of the troops bivouacked on the heights to the west

and north of the pass, forming part of the position held by the Afghan troops in the morning. British sources list three officers killed, 18 rank and files killed, and 67 wounded.

The following day (October 7) the British column camped at Beni-Hissar. In the afternoon of the same day, following a violent explosion, the British troops found that the magazine of the Sherpur cantonment that garrisoned the Afghan regiments was blown up and the place was now abandoned by the Afghan troops. The structure was located near the site of the British cantonments of 1839–1841. General Massy, the cavalry brigade commander, led a detachment there and took possession of the deserted Sherpur cantonment and of the 75 pieces of artillery parked within the vast unfinished casern.


Battle of Chaharasis , October 6, 1879
Indaki
to Kabul
Afghan forces
Sang-i-Nawishta
supporting attack
main attack
Chaharasia
British Assembly Area
Logan Valley

The Battle of Chaharasis, October 6, 1879.

But the battle for Kabul was not over yet. An Afghan general, Mohammad Jan Khan, had been in Charikar on a mission ordered by the amir. He returned with three regiments and some guns and took up positions on the Asmai Mountain, northwest of the city. This threatened the British camp in Kabul. The remnants of the defeated regiments at Chaharasia also joined this body of nearly 3,000 men and twelve guns. In order to dislodge the general's troops from the high ground dominating the city, General Roberts ordered General Baker to drive the Afghans from the heights and instructed Brigadier Massy to proceed through the Deh-Mazang gap to Chahar Dehi to intercept the likely retreat route of the Afghan force. Meanwhile, Baker ordered a detachment to crown the opposite hill of Sher-Darwaza, southwest of the town, in order to engage the Afghans on the opposing heights with artillery fire. However, the ascent of the Sher-Darwaza heights was so steep that it was late afternoon before the guns came into action, and the troop reinforcements did not reach there until dusk. At night, under cover of darkness, Mohammad Jan Khan evacuated his position and withdrew to the village of Murghgiran to the southwest of the capital at the foot of the Qurogh Mountain. From there, he retired to his home turf in Wardak to mobilize the tribes for a much larger action, which would occur less than two months later.[10]

On October 9, the division's camp moved forward to the Sia-Sang hills, a mile from the Bala-Hissar fortress to the east. Brigadier Baker's and Colonel Massy's columns closed into the camp. The Gurkha regiment was detached to hold the Kassa-Burj ridge overlooking the Bala-Hissar, while a cavalry regiment was quartered in the Sherpur cantonment. Amir Yaqub Khan's tent was set up on the Maranjan Hill, northeast of Bala-Hissar, under close British surveillance.

On October 12, General Roberts made a formal entry into the Bala-Hissar fortress, where he read a proclamation announcing the disarmament of Kabul's population and dictating a fine upon the city (which never was exacted). General Roberts ordered that Mustawfi Habibullah, Yahya Khan (the amir's father-in-law), and Zakaria Khan (his brother) be held as prisoners from among the sardars present. On the following day, Roberts marched at the head of his army through the streets of Kabul to impress and awe the defiant population of the capital. As the regiments in their divers uniforms marched to the sound of the music of bands and bagpipes behind their colors, the Kabulis greeted the invading *Farangis* with an aura of disapproval, indifference, and even gazes of hatred as they watched the procession from windows and street sides. Three days later (October 16) the Kabulis spoke about an ominous sign for the invaders after a stone hurled from an explosion of the arsenal in the upper Bala-Hissar hit the Union Jack flying nearby at the Shah Shahid Gate and broke it apart.[11] The explosion destroyed millions of cartridges and hundreds of tons of gunpowder and occurred while a British ordnance officer was examining the captured stockpile. The blast showered the fortress and the city with a storm of stone, beams, bullets, and debris, killing a number of British soldiers and four citizens of Kabul. Many others were injured. A thick smoke bellowed from the Bala-Hissar while explosions continued for several days thereafter. The Bala-Hissar was promptly evacuated.

Then it was time for the occupying force to punish the city for what happened to the ill-fated British Embassy, as it was the principle objective of the occupation of Kabul. What actually happened, however, was more retribution than justice. The action taken by the occupying force represented a violent posturing to impress everyone and to manifest the might of an invincible empire. This did not escape the ever-observant mind of the Kabulis.[12] General Roberts was given

a free hand in dealing with the Afghans in Kabul. The instructions, detailed to him by Lord Lytton in a private letter of September 9, were violent and dreadful. They sanctioned the prompt execution of those found linked with the attack on the embassy in a manner most likely to impress the populace.[13] This sounded more like inflicting mass terror than imposing justice. The viceroy had cautioned to mask the violent retribution from the critics back home by holding nominal trials to satisfy English sentiment. “I was told that in regard to the punishment of individuals, it should be swift, stern and impressive,” wrote Roberts. “You will deal summarily in the majority of cases with persons whose share in the murder of anyone belonging to the British Embassy shall have been proved by your investigations, but while the execution of justice should be as public and striking as possible, it should be completed with all possible expedition, since the indefinite prolongation of your proceedings might spread abroad unfounded alarm.”[14] The need to act quickly seriously undermined justice.

Although the British conducted a series of investigations to identify those who were directly or indirectly involved in the attack of the residence, it failed to get always the right people. Since the elite *Ardal* Regiment (household infantry regiment) spearheaded the attack, a witch hunt was conducted to find and arrest members of that regiment and send them to the gallows. Some of the regiment’s soldiers were caught, while many others had returned home and were out of reach of the authorities.[15] There were also citizens who were identified as guilty assassins by their personal enemies. Many bounty hunters named innocent persons in order to receive the 50-rupee reward for the service.[16] Meanwhile, Roberts decided to destroy the Bala-Hissar, the historical seat of the Afghan kings. He gave two days to the inhabitants to take their moveable property out, and then the British troops leveled the fortress to the ground

and spread the area with salt to make it unsuitable for plants. Over eighty years later, when I was attending the military academy, which was built on the ruins of the Bala-Hissar, the land still showed signs of salty soil.

On November 1, with the destruction of Bala-Hissar, the British headquarters and the rest of the division were moved to Sherpur cantonment. The cantonment was built by Amir Sher Ali Khan but was not completed. The British engineer troops made repairs and prepared the cantonment for winter quarters. It was also stocked with provisions and all needed supplies. The two actions, the destruction of the Bala-Hissar and the seizure of the Afghan military cantonment, were distinct blows to Afghan national pride.

Meanwhile, General Roberts took measures to make operational contact with the Peshawar field force, whose advance posts were established at Gandamak. On November 1, he dispatched a brigade of 1,800 men and four guns under Brigadier General Macpherson to Gandamak. During this move, the British forces decided to adopt a shorter and less difficult road to Jalalabad through the Lata-Band Pass in order to avoid the treacherous Khord-Kabul defile, which was the scene of the massacre of the British column in 1842. The Lata-Band Pass’s advantage over the Khord-Kabul route is its gradual ascent from Butkhak as well as being some miles shorter. A week later, Macpherson opened communication with Brigadier General Charles Gough, commanding the Peshawar division’s leading brigade at Gandamak, and thus Kabul’s line of communication with India through the Khyber Pass was secured and Macpherson’s Brigade returned to Kabul.

The way that the British treated Amir Yaqub Khan and the humiliation that he had to undergo became another source of deep public resentment in spite of the amir’s lack of popularity. Once Yaqub Khan failed to dissuade the British army from marching on Kabul, he stayed in the Roberts camp and was seen by his subjects as a prisoner of the

invaders. Even if he were to remain amir, his standing was so damaged that he could not rule the country anymore. So, on the day General Roberts made formal entry into the Bala-Hissar, the amir offered to abdicate his throne. After getting the approval of the viceroy, General Roberts issued a proclamation on October 28, 1879, announcing that the amir had of his own free will abdicated his throne and left Afghanistan without a government. The proclamation also declared that the British government "now commands that all Afghan authorities, chiefs, and Sardars, do continue their functions in maintaining order." The proclamation promised that the British government, in consultation with the Afghan sardars, tribal chiefs, and other representatives of the Afghan people, would decide on the arrangements to be made for setting up a permanent government in the country. In the coming days, when General Roberts was informed that the amir was contemplating fleeing to Turkistan, he placed the amir on close watch until he was sent under escort to Peshawar on December 1. Roberts took precautions to prevent the amir from being rescued by the tribes along the way. The Afghans had no doubt that the amir was a prisoner in the hands of the invading force and was exiled against his will.[17]

With the departure of the amir, the Afghans viewed the presence of the British as a blatant foreign occupation. In contrast to the Anglo-Afghan war of 1839–1842 there was neither a token Afghan monarch on the throne nor a credible Afghan army on the scene. The perceived intention of the British to occupy the country permanently was another source of public resentment, particularly since General Roberts took over the state treasury against Yaqub Khan's will and appointed Major General Hills as the governor of Kabul. The British used the wheat and other grain paid as taxes to provision their troops. This raised the price of grain beyond the reach of the poor people, a situation that caused public outcry similar to what the citizens experienced during

the first British war a generation back. So, the mobilization of the people against the foreign occupation happened sooner than during the previous Anglo-Afghan war. In the latter situation it took the people more than one year to rise in revolt against the invader, while now, just two months after the British entry into the capital, the nation was up and determined to force the enemy out of their homeland. Inspired by the fervent preaching of one of their most revered religious figures, Mullah Mushk-i-Alam of Ghazni, the people responded to his call for *Jihad* against the *Farangi*—a call echoed by every mosque across the country. The nation was also driven by patriotic sentiments to rise up against the "infidel" rule.

The Battle of Chahar Dehi

In the first week of December 1879, reports reached the British command in Kabul that three armies (*lashkars*) of Afghan fighters were about to descend on Kabul to expel the enemy from the capital. They included the Kohistani forces under local chiefs and others coming from the north of Kabul; the Logar and Greater Paktia tribes moving from the south; and the Ghazni, Wardak, and Maidan *lashkars* advancing from the southwest. The plan was to seize the hills and forts around Kabul in the first phase and then lay siege to the British forces in the Sherpur cantonment, replicating the "December" experience of the first Anglo-Afghan war. According to this plan, the northern *lashkar* of Kohistan would occupy the Asmai heights and the hills north of the capital while the army from the south, including the fighters from the Logar, Zurmat, Mangals, Jajis, Zadrans, and the Ghilzai tribes of the area, was to seize the ranges of hills extending from Chaharasia to the Sher-Darwaza heights, including the upper Bala-Hissar and the Takht-i-Shah peak overhanging the Bala-Hissar fortress. After the heights were

secured, the southwestern *lashkar* under General Mohammad Jan Khan was to enter the city through the Deh-Mazang gap and attack the British garrison in Sherpur in cooperation with the Kabulis.

Seeing the concentration of such an enormous force as a major threat to the British position in Kabul and realizing that it would be hard to defeat using the available British troops in the capital, General Roberts decided to prevent the linkup of these various contingents, defeat them in detail, and disperse them before they could join together. The plan he adopted for the purpose was based on poor intelligence, unrealistic assumptions, and inadequate forces. The execution of the plan lacked coordination and was frustrated by poor leadership. The result was a tactical defeat of the British forces and eventually an operational isolation of the capital garrison. General Roberts underestimated the strength of the resistance forces and overestimated his own capacity to deal with them. Given the logistic limitations of accommodating more British forces at Sherpur, General Roberts did not ask for major reinforcements. However, Roberts telegraphed General Bright at Jalalabad and ordered the dispatch of the Guides Corps to support the Kabul garrison.

In order to implement his concept of preventing the different bodies of the Afghan army from concentrating at Kabul, Roberts dispatched two brigade-sized columns to meet the Afghan *lashkars* before they reached the capital. One column, under Brigadier General Macpherson, consisted of three cavalry squadrons, eight guns, and elements of three infantry regiments, totaling 1,303 rifles, and was ordered on December 8, 1879, to move west along the Ghazni road to Arghandeh to meet the forces of Mohammad Jan Khan and drive them back toward Maidan. Another column, under Brigadier General Baker, comprised three cavalry troops, four guns, and elements of two infantry regiments, totaling 900 rifles, and was dispatched south on

December 9 to break up the tribal gathering in Logar and then swing sharply westward through the Lalander Gorge to Maidan to cut off the retreat of Mohammad Jan Khan's force, which would be pushed by Macpherson's force from the front. In order to coordinate the actions of the two brigades in their intended "anvil and hammer" operation, it was necessary to give Baker time to reach his designated line in Maidan. Thus, Macpherson halted at Aushar (Afshar) village on December 9. He planned to initiate action on the following day. This plan was based on two flawed assumptions. First, it was assumed that the concentration of Kohistanis would not interfere with the coordinated operation of the Macpherson and Baker brigades. Second, the concept assumed that Mohammad Jan Khan would not prevent Macpherson from advancing out of Arghandeh and beat him to the punch. The actual situation on December 9 and 10 revealed the miscalculations of the British command and led to its failure to prevent the Afghan forces from entering Kabul and eventually investing the British cantonment at Sherpur.

After reaching Afshar on December 9, Macpherson sent out two reconnaissance detachments, one to the north to check on the movement of the Kohistanis under Mir Bacha Khan and the other to the southwest to watch the activity of Mohammad Jan Khan's army in the Arghandeh area. Reports from the two reconnaissance bodies were alarming. The northern patrol reported that a large force of Kohistanis had gathered at Karez-i-Mir, about 10 miles north of Afshar, while the southern Arghandeh patrol detected large numbers of Afghan combatants moving from Arghandeh and Paghman toward Kohistan to join the contingents of Mir Bacha Khan. The reports caused General Roberts to alter his plan—with disastrous consequences. He ordered Macpherson to move out of Afshar on December 10, wheel northward through Paghman to Karez-i-Mir, attack the Kohistani concentration, and disperse them before returning to his original line of

advance. Since the terrain was not suitable for the cavalry and horse artillery, Macpherson left the mounted units, except for one cavalry squadron, at Afshar and led his infantry around the edges of the hills separating Karez-i-Mir from the Chahar-Dehi Valley heading to Karez-i-Mir through the Surkh Kotal Pass. On the pass, he sighted the Kohistanis occupying a position about two miles to his right front, on a steep, conical, isolated hill over the village of Karez-i-Mir. On his left and left rear, the hills were alive with *ghazis* near the village of Paghman. Brigadier General Macpherson decided to attack the Kohistanis swiftly while securing his rear against the Paghman-based crowd.

Leaving Lieutenant Colonel Money with six companies of infantry and two guns to hold the ridge at Surkh Kotal, Macpherson pushed his force in three columns against the Kohistani concentration and ordered his cavalry squadron to hover on the left flank and threaten the enemy line of retreat. The Kohistani contingents resisted the attack on the hill but, under the withering fire of the British column, were forced to retire to the north. The action at Karez-i-Mir forced elements of the Afghan *lashkars* moving from Arghandeh to join the Kohistanis' divergence to the southwest. Macpherson camped for the night between Karez-i-Mir and Paghman. To the west, Brigadier General Baker reached the designated line at Maidan, about 20 miles southwest of Kabul.

Early on December 11, General Roberts ordered Macpherson to march from his camp through Paghman toward Arghandeh, engage the Afghan forces under Mohammad Jan Khan, and drive them southwest into the path of Baker's brigade in Maidan. He left Brigadier General Massy in command of the troops at Afshar, which consisted of about 300 horse and four field guns. He was instructed to move at 9:00 AM on the same day to Arghandeh along the main Ghazni road and to coordinate with the Macpherson column. He was, however, warned not to join battle until the Macpherson forces arrived and engaged the enemy forces.

But instead of moving along the main Kabul-Arghandeh road, Massy took a shortcut across the broken terrain and at Qala-i-Qazi; he stumbled into a considerable number of Afghan fighters on the hills flanking the road. Assuming that they were local villagers, Massy did not wait for Macpherson and opened fire only to find that he was facing the main body of the Afghan force under Mohammad Jan Khan. This force numbered some 5,000 men and spread out in an arc while marching steadily forward to the sound of their drums. Massy ordered an artillery bombardment, which could not stop the enemy advance. His second effort was to engage the enemy columns with Martini-Henry massed rifle fire. His dismounted troops slowed but did not stop the approaching Afghan forces. Receiving the news at Sherpur of what had happened at Qala-i-Qazi, General Roberts rushed to the scene and ordered Massy to delay the Afghans in order to gain time for the arrival of Macpherson's column.

Macpherson had left his camp at 8:00 AM, heading southwest to Arghandeh by following a direct route astride the ridges that form the western edge of the Chahar Dehi Valley. He had to cover some 20 miles over broken terrain before reaching the designated line to join Massy. But the skirmishes had begun much earlier than Macpherson's expected arrival. Massy faced a tough job of delaying the Afghans and saving the guns from falling into their hands. He ordered a number of cavalry charges to cover the withdrawal of the guns. His small force retreated with the Afghans close on its heels. Roberts made a last stand at the village of Onchi Baghwanan before the villagers came out and attacked the badly pressed British Lancers. The guns became stuck in an irrigation ditch and were abandoned. During the clashes, Roberts narrowly escaped death after the village chief attacked him. He was saved by a nearby dismounted Lancer. As the British position became untenable, the troops retreated, staggering over the three miles of country to the Deh-Mazang Gorge. The gorge was

occupied by two companies of Highlanders that Roberts had called out earlier from Sherpur to cover the retreat of the British line and facilitate their unmolested withdrawal to the Sherpur cantonment. Macpherson arrived on the scene about one hour after the battle was ended. Riding over the area strewn with the bodies of his fallen comrades and exchanging shots with the rearguard of the Afghan forces, Macpherson reached Deh-Mazang at 7:00 PM. Unaware of the development at Chahar-Dehi, Baker moved northeast from Maidan, reaching Arghandeh the same night. There, he learned what had happened during the day. He returned to Sherpur on the following day (December 12). The British casualties of the day numbered 74, including 30 dead.

The British defeat in the Chahar-Dehi battle boosted the morale of the Afghan fighters and swelled their ranks with swarms of people from around Kabul and other nearby districts. Exploiting its victory, the Afghan army, under Mohammad Jan Khan and other tribal leaders, moved to invest the capital by crowning the high ground around the city including the Sher Darwaza Mountain and its adjacent peak of Takht-i-Shah. Roberts's efforts on December 13 failed to dislodge them due to the strong resistance by the tribesmen. On the following day (December 14), large numbers of Afghans, including the Kohistanis, mounted the Asmai hill extending to the Deh-Mazang Gorge. The British garrison failed to drive them off and lost two guns in the effort. To complete the siege of the city, another Afghan force occupied the Sia-Sang hills to the east of the city and repulsed an attempted British cavalry attack to drive them out. Having failed in his plan to destroy the Afghan forces piecemeal, General Roberts was forced to withdraw all his troops to the Sherpur cantonment. The areas vacated by the British were immediately occupied by the Afghans. Roberts later confessed to the mistakes that he made throughout the operation: "I could not help feeling somewhat depressed at the turn things had taken." He wrote,

> I had no news from Baker, and we had undoubtedly suffered a reverse, which I knew only too well would give confidence to the Afghans, who, from the footing they had now gained on the heights above Kabul, threatened the Bala Hissar, which place, stored as it was with powder and other material of war, I had found it necessary to continue to occupy. Nevertheless, reviewing the incidents of the 11th December, as I have frequently done since, with all the concomitant circumstances deeply impressed on my memory, I have failed to discover that any disposition of my force different from that I made could have had better results, or that what did occur could have been averted by greater forethought or more careful calculation on my part.[18]

The Siege of Sherpur

With the withdrawal of the British forces from their outlying posts to the Sherpur cantonment, the British garrison was now besieged by Afghans, who rode up to the walls of the cantonment in a show of defiance. The Sherpur cantonment, with its four-mile perimeter, was a formidable defensive structure. It was particularly strong on the west and southern sides, where continuous protective walls made it almost impregnable without siege guns. On the east, the walls were not higher than seven feet and the defensive works were weaker. However, when the British decided to make the structure the main quarters of the British garrison, some improvements were made on the eastern side, including raising the height of the bulwark using logs and other material. On the north, the cantonment was anchored on the Bibi-Mahru heights, where it was well protected, but it was vulnerable on both its ends. In order to strengthen the northern enclosure, the British constructed entrenchments on the crest of the heights and in the gorge that cut through the hill. Further, the gap at the northeast corner was covered with fortifications and barriers. The walls were further strengthened by various obstacles, including abates and wire entanglements. Gun emplacements were prepared throughout the perimeter. In order to clear fields of fire around the walls and deny cover to Afghan forces close to the cantonment, General Roberts ordered the destruction of

several forts and enclosures in the immediate vicinity of the cantonment. He also divided the defenses into five sectors, each under a senior commander, including Brigadier General Macpherson, Colonel Jenkins, Brigadier General Hugh Gough, Major General Hills, and Colonel Brownlow. Additionally, Brigadier General Massy maintained a command post at the center while Brigadier General Baker commanded the reserve, which was deployed in the depression on the Bibi-Mahru heights.[19]

The situation shared certain similarities with December 1841, when the British garrison was besieged by Afghan forces in its cantonment located very close to the Sherpur cantonment. In both cases, the British envoy had been killed, the Afghans were up in arms against the British occupation, and the cost of the war was rising. However in 1879, the British forces were based in a much stronger post and had stored sufficient supplies that could last them until spring; the troops were armed with more effective weapons and were better led than the forces under Elphinstone in 1841. Further the Afghan forces of 1879 were good fighters but lacked charismatic leaders such as Sardar Akbar Khan of 1841, who dominated the situation through a combination of military action and diplomatic moves. Nevertheless, the fervor of *Jihad* and patriotism in 1879 was not lacking. National leaders, including Mohammad Jan Khan Wardak, Mullah Mushk-i-Alam Andar Ghilzai of Ghazni, Mir Bacha Khan of Kohdaman, Usman Khan Safi of Nejrao, Ghulam Haidar Khan Charkhi of Logar, and many others inspired increasing numbers of *ghazis* to fight the enemy.

With the occupation of the city by the Afghan forces, the British governor of Kabul fled and took refuge in Sherpur. The elderly Mullah Mushk-i-Alam was appointed the governor of Kabul. The surprisingly energetic nonagenarian had also become the spirit of anti-British resistance and the inspiration for the *ghazis.* He had named Musa Jan, the young son of Yaqub Khan, the interim amir and declared

Jihad against the *Kafirs*. Further the wife of the ex-amir was the daughter of Sardar Akbar Khan, the hero of the first Anglo-Afghan war. She was actively involved in the resistance movement. The amir's mother offered her jewelry and other valuables to be used in support of the cause.

The December fighting coincided with the "decade of Ashura" (the first 10 days of the month of Muharram) on the Islamic calendar, when the Muslims commemorate the martyrdom of Hussein, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, along with members of his family and his companions at the Battle of Karbala in 680 AD by the army of the Umayyad Caliph Yazid, who the Prophet's adherents believed had openly gone against the teaching of Islam. The Muslim communities mourn the event in annual commemorations as an example of the struggle and sacrifice of the true believers against the evil forces. The solemn aura of the period inspired many to fight the British infidels to attain martyrdom. This caused many Afghan combatants to attack with swords and other simple weapons against the well-armed enemy, who cut them down in large numbers with the withering fire of their Martini-Henry breech-loading rifles. Although the British garrison launched several attacks to dislodge the Afghan fighters from key positions around Kabul and made some fleeting inroads, the overall atmosphere was growing more and more hostile to the British. On December 14, some 400 women participated in the battle for the Asmai hill and over 80 of them were killed during the battles for Kabul in December 1879. The public openly stoned the passing British columns and occasionally they were shot at by the citizens of Kabul. In some cases, the British troops retaliated by destroying and burning whole villages.[20]

In order to break the solidarity of the Afghan fighters, British intelligence fueled sectarian tension between the Shi'a and Sunni and sowed distrust among the Afghan leaders by spreading rumors that certain Afghan leaders had been bribed by the British to undermine the resistance.

Among these rumors was the claim that Mohammad Jan Khan had been paid by the British for collaboration. Meanwhile, British intelligence hired one Colonel Waliullah Khan Tajik to instigate Shi'a-Sunni conflict within Ghazni, which had become one of the major hotbeds of resistance. In spite of some strong local opposition to the sectarian violence, the colonel succeeded in inducing the Hazaras of the Jaghatu, Qiyagh, and other western districts of Ghazni to target their Ghilzai Pashtun neighbors for attacks and pillage.[21] The situation was further exacerbated when the Afghan tribesmen, during their occupation of Kabul in mid-December 1879, plundered the quarters of Shi'a Qizil-Bash (Chindawal) who were considered British collaborators. When the news reached the Hazaras in Ghazni, they retaliated against the Sunnis in the province, causing many fighters in Kabul to rush to their homes to protect their families.[22] The situation weakened the resistance ranks in Kabul and contributed to their failure to defeat the British garrison at Sherpur.

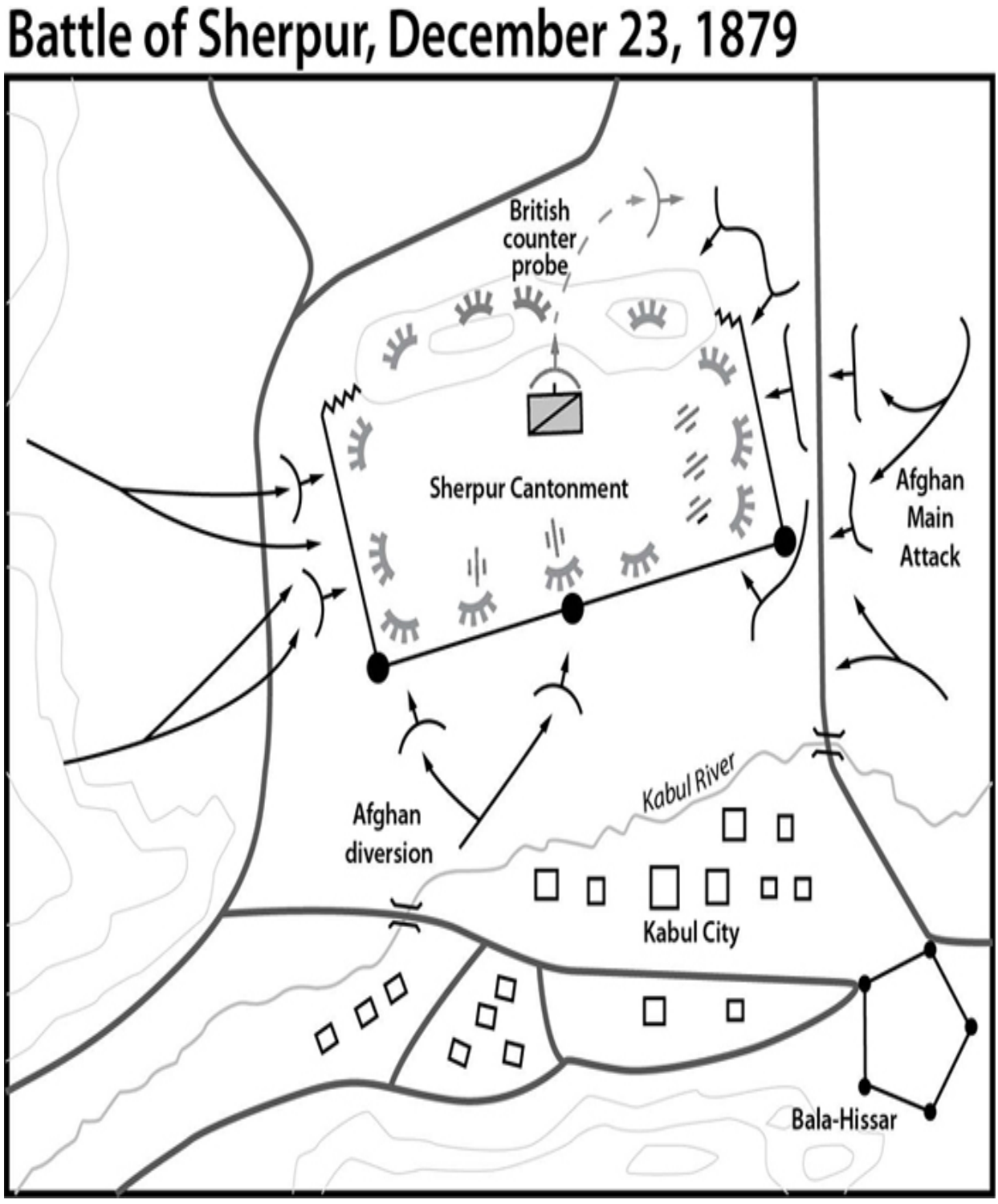
Once the Afghan leaders were in control of the city and confident in their positions, they proposed peace terms to General Roberts. They offered to allow the British forces to withdraw unmolested to India in exchange for the return of Amir Yaqub Khan and to leave two senior British officers as hostages in the Afghans' hands as a guarantee of British compliance. The Afghans threatened in one of their reported messages that "we have a lakh of men, they are like wolves eager to rush on their prey! We cannot much longer control them."[23] The message was similar to what the Afghans demanded during the first Anglo-Afghan war, and Roberts was aware of what the consequences were of the earlier treaty.

On December 23, 1879, on the eve of Ashura, the anti-British resistance in Kabul culminated with a mass assault on the British cantonment at Sherpur. Preparations for the

attack were detected during the days leading up to the assault. On December 20, the Afghans took possession of the Mohammad Sharif Khan Fort, which was located near the present campus of Amani High School and the US Embassy. The fort threatened the southern wall of Sherpur. The Afghans retained the fort in the face of the fire of siege guns mounted on the bastions of the cantonment. During the following two days, large numbers of Afghans left the city and moved eastward behind the Sia-Sang hill, taking possession of forts and villages facing the eastern wall of Sherpur. On December 22, British spies and Afghan collaborators, including Sardar Wali Mohammad Khan Lotti, reported the details of the Afghan plan of attack. The attack was to begin early on December 23 when Mullah Mushk-i-Alam kindled the beacon fire on the Asmai Mountain, signaling the *ghazis* to begin the assault. “I was just dozing off to sleep again after having visited my sentries at midnight,” wrote Major Mitford, “when I heard someone ride up . . . [who] told us that some Kizil Bashis [Qizil-Bash] had just come in with the information that there was to be a general attack before dawn, the signal to be a beacon lighted on the shoulder of the Asmai ridge just above the city.”[24] According to the plan some 2,000 men holding the Bagh-i-Shah (located in parts of the present Presidential Palace) and the Mohammad Sharif Khan fort equipped with scaling leaders were to launch a diversionary assault against the western section of the southern wall while the main attack was to be made against the eastern face of the Bibi-Mahru village, the most vulnerable section of the Sherpur cantonment.

On December 23, the British troops at Sherpur consisted of over 7,000 combat troops, almost the same number of camp followers and 24 guns.[25] These were augmented by about 2,000 on the following day, when the battle was over, when Brigadier General Charles Gough and his brigade arrived from Jalalabad. Many English authors exaggerate the number

of Afghan combatants in the Sherpur battle with numbers up to 100,000. General Roberts calculated the strength of the enemy besieging Sherpur at 60,000 men. Given the sequence of the events, the terrain, and the population of the area at the time, the number of both Kabuli and tribal fighters could hardly have exceeded 20,000 and not all of them actively participated in the attack. The population of Kabul, the largest urban center in the country at the time, was not more than 60,000.[26] The tribesman from Wardak, Maidan, and Ghazni were 5,000 to 10,000 at best.[27] The contingent from the north that left after the battle reportedly numbered some 5,000.[28] And of course there were other fighters who joined from Kabul and Logar. Howard Hensman stated that "nearly 20,000 men must have been sent to take part in the assault."[29] However, the number included noncombatants, including volunteers from Kabul. Given the active line of the main assault from the southeastern corner of Sherpur to the eastern extremities of the Bibi-Mahru hill (a bit over a mile) and the need for room to maneuver, probably no more than 10,000 men participated in the assault, and that was conducted in several waves. This number also corresponds with what General Macgregor entered in his dairy on December 23, 1879.[30]



The Battle of Sherpur, December 23, 1879.

The British troops were alerted well in advance, and the troops silently drew arms and ammunition and took up

positions before the assault began. At 5:30 AM, a long flame shot up from the top of the Asmai hill. The silence was broken suddenly by heavy fire from the broken ground 200 yards from one of the gateways on the southern wall. Wasting no ammunition in the dark and knowing that this assault was a diversion, the British troops on the wall took cover waiting for the main show to begin. Their main attention was focused on General Hugh Gough's sector at the eastern end of the Bibi-Mahru Hill and on the adjacent sector, commanded by Colonel Jenkins, which ran from Bibi-Mahru village down to the bastion at the southeastern corner. The main assault began around 6:00 AM against the eastern trenches. "From beyond Bemaru [Bibi-Mahru] and the eastern trenches and walls came a roar of voices so loud and menacing that it seemed as if an army 50,000 strong were charging down upon our thin line of men," wrote Hensman, who was an eyewitness to the battle.

> Led by their *ghazis*, the main body of Afghans hidden in the villages and orchards on the eastern side of Sherpur had rushed out in one dense mob and filled the air with their cry of "*Allah-il-Allah*" (*La-illa-ha-il-Allah*). The roar surged forward as their line advanced, but it was answered by such a roll of musketry that it was drowned for an instant, and then merged into the general din, which told us that our men with Martinis and Sniders were holding their own against the attacking force. For ten minutes the roar was continuous, and then the musketry fire dwindled down to occasional volleys and scattered shots from the south-eastern bastion to the Bemaru Heights, where the mountain guns were waiting for daylight before opening fire.[31]

Since the attack came when it was still dark and misty, the British troops were ordered to hold their fire except when they could see the approaching enemy. The Afghan fighters lacked fire discipline and fired wildly and mostly ineffectively. With the improvement of visibility, the troops were ordered to open fire, and the Afghans who had approached within 80 to 200 yards were decimated by the volleys of murderous fire. Hensman reported that "the attack collapsed as suddenly as it had begun, the Afghans saw what execution men in trenches and behind parapets can do with breech-

loaders in their hands, and they took cover behind walls and trees, from whence they expended thousands of cartridges, doing us but little damage." It was an unequal fight between the Afghan swordsmen and the breech-loading enemy riflemen. The Bibi-Mahru Hill saw quite a different battle from the one fought there 38 years before during the same month. Then the Afghan native musket, the *Jezail*, far outranged the British troops' Brown Bess musket and devastated the British infantry in the open. Now the British soldiers were well protected in their defenses with much more effective breech-loaders in their hands that were spitting galling fire at a rapid rate on the unprotected Afghan swordsmen in the open before the walls.

At day break, the British guns came into action, and from 7:00 to 10:00 AM they shelled the tribesmen as well as the villages and enclosures where the *ghazis* had taken cover. Artillery and rifle fire repulsed repeated attempts of the Afghans to scale the southeastern wall, although many times the attackers "got up as far as the abattis, but were repulsed, heap of dead marking the spots where these attempts had been most persistent."[32] By 10:00 AM, there was a lull in the fighting but at 11:00 AM, a few thousand regrouped *ghazis* again tried to assault the British lines and the battle "grew hot as ever," wrote Roberts:

> and finding we could not drive the enemy back by any fire which could be brought against them from the defences, I resolved to attack them in flank. Accordingly, I directed Major Craster, with four Field Artillery guns, and Lieutenant Colonel Williams, with the 5th Punjab Cavalry, to move out over the hollow in the Beimaru range and open fire on a body of the enemy collected in and around the village of Kurja [Khwaja] Kila. This fire had the desired effect; the Afghans wavered and broke.[33]

The detachment wheeled right from the Bibi-Mahru gorge and threatened the right flank of the Afghan main attack. Some Afghan sources claim that certain Afghan commanders at that spot were bribed by the British and let the line break in the face of the British counterattack.[34]

Meanwhile, General Charles Gough's brigade from Jalalabad arrived in Butkhak. It was there to reinforce the Sherpur garrison, as General Roberts had requested earlier, and now threatened the Afghan forces from the east. By 1:00 PM, as the tribesmen began to scatter, General Roberts unleashed his cavalry on them and ordered them to pursue the enemy and cut his retreat routes to the east to Butkhak, to the north through the Khwaja Rawash village, and to south and west through Beni-Hissar and the city of Kabul. By the nightfall, all the open ground around the Sherpur was cleared of the Afghan combatants. At the same time, the British command dispatched a body of troops to destroy some villages near the southeastern wall that had caused the British much trouble. The action was also deemed necessary to clear the advance route of Brigadier General Charles Gough's brigade, which would enter Sherpur the following day.

The British report their losses from December 10 to 23 as 389, including 126 killed. This is four times greater than the British casualties incurred while capturing Kabul in October 1879. During the same period, the Afghan losses are estimated at 2,000–3,000 killed and wounded, of which some 1,000 were killed during the assault on Sherpur on December 23.

With the retirement of the tribesmen, the British army reoccupied Kabul and reappointed General Hill the governor of Kabul. Following a policy of carrot and stick, General Roberts issued a proclamation of amnesty, stating that "all who come in without delay will be pardoned, excepting only Muhammad Jan of Wardak, Mir Bacha of Kohistan, Samander Khan of Logar, Ghulam Haider of Chahar Dehi." The leniency notwithstanding, the British forces launched an extended operation to destroy the rebellious villages and to pursue the leaders of the resistance. Mohammad Jan Khan and Mullah Mushk-i-Alam continued their anti-British mobilization in Ghazni.

Although the British division defeated the uprising in Kabul, it was merely a tactical achievement. The potential for the resurgence of insurgency in Kabul and other provinces was still intact. On March 13, 1880, in order to pacify the country and create favorable conditions for the withdrawal of the British forces from Afghanistan, the commander in chief directed that the force in Kabul, under Roberts, now promoted to lieutenant general, should be split into two divisions. The 1st Division was to be under General Roberts's immediate command, and the 2nd Division under Major General Ross. The whole force, commanded by General Roberts, was named "The Kabul Field Force." For this purpose the Kabul garrison was augmented with about four artillery batteries, one cavalry brigade, three companies of sappers and miners, two European and six Native Infantry regiments, and sufficient drafts to raise each infantry regiment in Kabul to 800 men. The 2nd Division stood up at the end of March, and the number of combat troops in the capital reached over 12,000.

Meanwhile, as the responsibility of the defense of southern Afghanistan was given to the Bombay army, General Donald Stewart handed over command in Kandahar to Lieutenant General Primrose and moved his division (comprising Bengal regiments) to Kabul. There, he took overall command in the north, as he was senior to General Roberts.

The Battle of Ahmad Khel

The forces under General Stewart consisted of one cavalry and two infantry brigades, including three Native cavalry regiments, two European and five Native infantry regiments, and four artillery batteries (22 guns), with a total number of over 7,000 combat soldiers and an equal number of followers. In its long march to Kabul the division faced the dual challenges of protecting the column against possible

attacks by the Ghilzais between Qalat and Ghazni and finding sufficient transport and supplies while traveling in a hostile and underresourced tract of territory. Although General Stewart decided to carry two months of supplies, which encumbered his column with a long convoy of over 9,000 draft animals, the expected loss of the animals on the way was a real concern. He even suggested remaining in Ghazni once the division reached there, but this was not supported by the overall military plan of the commander in chief of India, who wrote to General Stewart on March 31 that while the British government was anxious to withdraw from Afghanistan pending the designation of a ruler for Kabul, “it is essential that we should make such a display of strength in Afghanistan as it will show that we are masters of the situation and will overawe disaffection; but it is not desirable to spread our troops over a large tract of country or to send small columns to any place where they would encounter opposition and increase the hostile feeling against us.” General Stewart was instructed to march to Ghazni, “break up any opposition he may find there or in the neighborhood,” and link up with General Roberts’s forces in Kabul, where he was to assume overall command of the British forces.

The column left Qalat on April 8 and passed unmolested through Shahjui, reaching Muqur on April 14, where the real troubles began. The Taraki country begins at Shahjui and joins further north with the territory of the Andar and Suleiman Khel Ghilzai tribes. The British forces kept them under surveillance but did not see attacking them as a wise move since the tribal *lashkars* could conveniently retire to the hills only to reappear at the right time and place to strike. Afghan sources indicated that the Ghilzai tribes had moved their families and moveable property to the Zurmat District in the east for safety and decided to rise up in arms against the British column and try to destroy it before it reached Kabul.[35]

But the British force found local allies in the Hazaras, who used the opportunity to settle scores with their Pashtun neighbors. The English journalist Howard Hensman, who covered the war for the British Indian media, wrote that

> with the British force were several thousand Hazaras, who, as is usually the case with native allies, were rather a source of anxiety than any real aid. They marched in wild irregularity on the flanks of the column, and every deserted village was plundered by them without compunction. . . . Their inveterate hatred of the Afghans [Pashtuns] had full swing, and they hailed our march upon Ghazni with savage satisfaction as giving them an opportunity of wiping off old scores. Now that they find we do not intend staying in the country their spirits are somewhat damped, as their future presents nothing more pleasing than a war of revenge by the southern tribesmen as soon as our armies have returned to India.[36]

Although the Hazaras helped the column by bringing supplies to them, they caused embarrassment to the British forces as they pillaged and burned the villages, vandalized graves, and enslaved any noncombatant they put their hands on. In a letter to his wife from Jamrad, dated April 17, 1880, General Stewart wrote, “our friends the Hazaras are taking advantage of our presence to burn down all the Afghan [Pashtun] forts and villages, and I daresay we shall get the credit of it. They are a queer people. . . . The fact is, they are all barbarian cut-throats. I shall not have anything to say to the Hazaras, and shall decline their co-operation if they offer it.”[37]

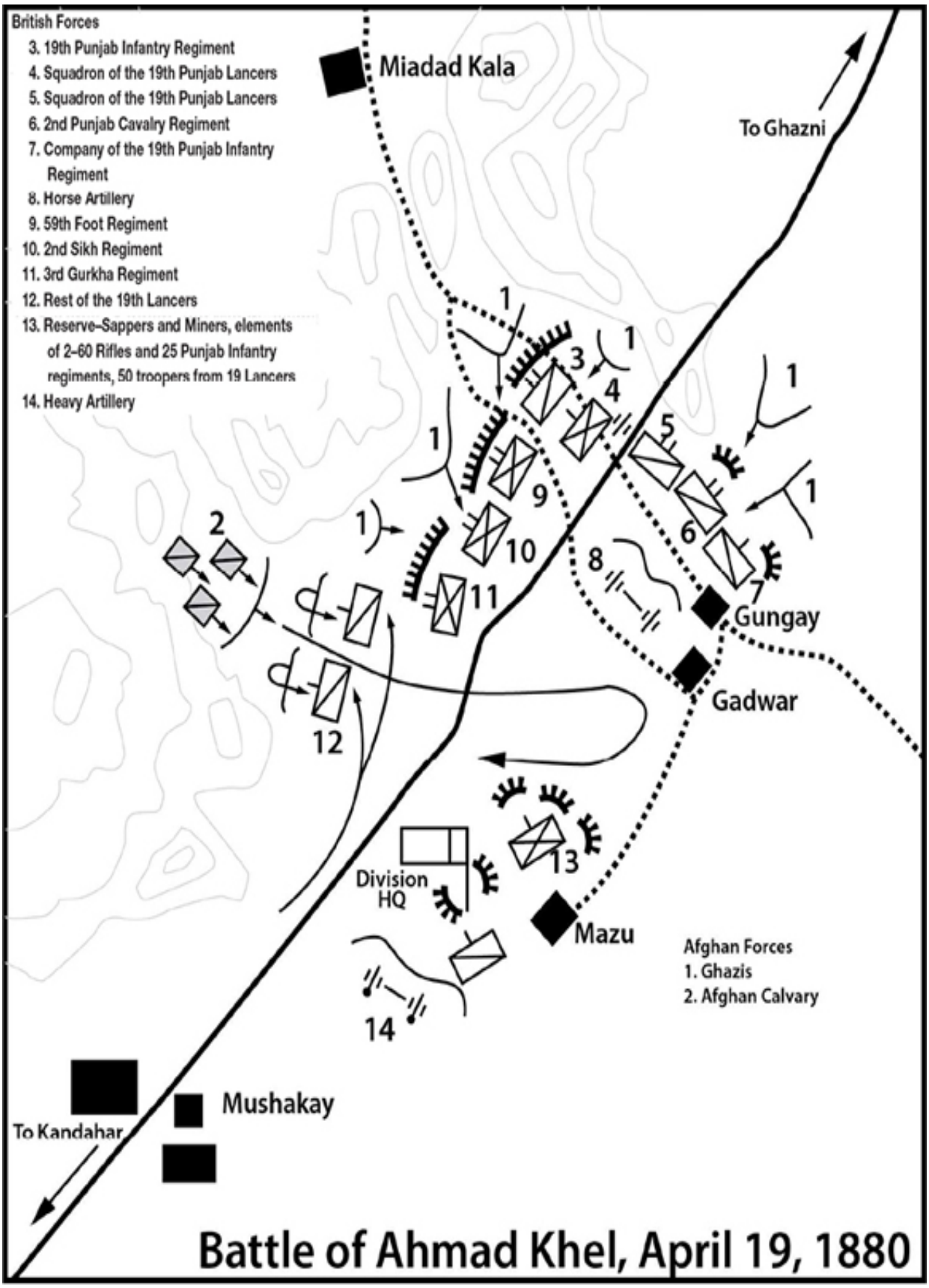
As the British division marched toward Ghazni, an increasing number of Ghilzai tribesman—mostly from the Taraki, Suleiman Khel, Andar, and Tokhi subtribes almost in equal numbers, plus a few Hotaks and Kakars, several tribesmen from Zamindawar, and a contingent of hundreds of Taliban (religious students) from Kandahar—continued hovering on the flanks of the British forces. The tribal *lashkar* was moving parallel to the line of the British advance since it left Kandahar, and its ranks kept swelling with volunteers and *ghazis* as it moved on. British intelligence sources estimated the number of the Afghan tribesmen on April 18 at

12,000–15,000 men; not all of them were active combatants. The core of the force comprised real *ghazis*, including twelve women who were allowed to remove their *purdah* and followed the *ghazis* into action.[38] The fighters were not organized into specific units or trained in combat drills but operated in various bodies within their tribal structures and fought in their own traditional way. It was mostly a self-reliant army as the men brought their own arms, ammunition, and provisions. The principal leader of the whole tribal army was Sher Jan, brother of a legendary *ghazi*, the late Sahib Jan, who was killed in a heroic encounter with the British troops at Shahjui in October 1879.[39] Other tribal chiefs included Muhammad Aslam Tokhi, Sher Muhammad Andar (who served as a general after the war), Pir Muhammad Taraki (who had lost a hand in the battle of Shahjui), Mamo Khan Suleiman Khel, Zarin Taraki, and others.

The Afghan tribal army planned to follow the British forces to Ghazni and, after joining the local fighters there, attack the enemy with a larger force. The British rapid advance, however, forced the tribesmen to face the British division at Ahmad Khel, some 20 miles west of Ghazni.[40] On April 18, when the British column had camped at Mushaki, about 30 miles southwest of Ghazni, their spies, who had visited the Afghan camp at Nani, located 15 miles farther toward Ghazni, reported that the tribesmen would attempt to block the advance of the column on the next morning and would probably take up their position on a low spur running eastward from the Gul Koh Mountains to dominate the road. That location was about seven miles from the British camp at Mushaki. Now, as the length of the British column was about six miles, it meant that as the leading cavalry closed upon Ahmed Khel the rear guard would have just cleared Mushaki. Therefore Stewart decided to structure the order of march to

support rapid deployment into combat right from the time of moving out of the camp at Mushaki.

The terrain at the intended battlefield is bounded on the northwestern flank of the road by a spur of the Gul-Koh range that abruptly curves to the southeast across the road sloping down until it gradually drops onto the plain. The main road passed through a low saddle on the southeastern ridge just above the point where it descends to the lowland, about seven miles from Mushaki. Thus the line of advance to Ghazni at that spot was dominated by high ground on both sides. The Afghan army decided to occupy the ridge and block the enemy column from the front and threaten it from both sides of the road.


British Forces
3. 19th Punjab Infantry Regiment
4. Squadron of the 19th Punjab Lancers
5. Squadron of the 19th Punjab Lancers
6. 2nd Punjab Cavalry Regiment
7. Company of the 19th Punjab Infantry Regiment
8. Horse Artillery
9. 59th Foot Regiment
10. 2nd Sikh Regiment
11. 3rd Gurkha Regiment
12. Rest of the 19th Lancers
13. Reserve–Sappers and Miners, elements of 2–60 Rifles and 25 Punjab Infantry regiments, 50 troopers from 19 Lancers
14. Heavy Artillery
Miadad Kala
To Ghazni
Gungay
Gadwar
Division HQ
Mazu
Mushakay
To Kandahar
Afghan Forces
1. Ghazis
2. Afghan Calvary
Battle of Ahmad Khel, April 19, 1880

The Battle of Ahmad Khel, April 19, 1880.

On April 19, 1880, the Stewart column marched out of Mushaki at daybreak and proceeded in a ready-to-fight order of march with the advance guard, under Brigadier General Palliser, comprising one Native cavalry (the 19th Bengal Lancers) and one Native infantry regiment (the 19th Punjab Infantry) and six guns. The division headquarters and its security escort followed the advance guard. The main body consisted of the 2nd Infantry Brigade under Brigadier General Hughes, including one European regiment (the 59th Foot) and two Native infantry regiments (the 3rd Gurkha and 2nd Sikh), one Native cavalry regiment (the 2nd Punjab Cavalry) and 10 guns. The baggage train was placed between the main body and the rear guard, which consisted of the 1st Infantry Brigade (under Brigadier General Barter), including one European infantry regiment (the 2–60th Rifles), two Native infantry regiments (the 925th Punjab and 15th Sikh), one Native Cavalry regiment (the 1st Punjab Cavalry), and six guns. In order to consolidate the force, General Stewart ordered the 1st Brigade to catch up at Jamrad before resuming their march on April 18.

While the British column made a short halt after leaving Mushaki, the cavalry patrols of the advance guard reported that bodies of Afghan tribesmen were in positions on the high ground across the line of advance some three miles ahead. General Stewart ordered the infantry regiments of the main body to form on the left of the road, in line with the horse artillery battery and the 2nd Punjab Cavalry, to deploy to the flat country on the right to cover the column from the enemy’s flanking maneuver.

When the advance was resumed, one and a half squadrons of the 19th Bengal Lancers covered the left flank of the infantry regiments, which was in close proximity of a range of low hills that ran parallel to the road for some distance and then bent eastward where the road passed through

them. Afghans were visible in positions along the ridge on both sides of the road, with their right wing extended for some distance. The positions flanked the route along which the division would advance. The artillery batteries took up positions with the horse battery on the right and the field battery on the left. As the column reached within a mile and a half of the Afghans, the guns began shelling the ridge in front while the 2nd Punjab Cavalry and one company of 19th Punjab Infantry provided protection for the artillery batteries. The infantry regiments deployed in line of quarter columns[41] to the left of the guns with the 59th Foot; the 2nd Sikh and the 3rd Gurkha regiments lined up from right to left, facing the Afghans' right wing. The heavy guns unlimbered on a knoll close to the road, about one mile from the left of the field artillery, on the extreme left of the line, but there was a considerable gap between them and the 19th Bengal Lancers. The troops detailed for the reserve were in the rear of the left, while General Stewart's command post was established on a slight elevation immediately behind the 19th Bengal Lancers.

At 8:00 AM, the column moved forward while the Afghan contingents swarmed the hillcrests to the west, occupying a nearly two-mile front and taking up positions on the low hill to the southeast that straddled the road in front of the British column. While the British command was getting ready to mount a combined-arms attack on the tribal *lashkars*, it appeared that the Afghan forces intended to strike the enemy column along its entire length by launching three simultaneous attacks: a cavalry charge against the left and rear of the column penetrating into the heart of the British disposition; an infantry assault on the right flank of the enemy through the open terrain on the east; and a massive *ghazi* offensive from the heights on the west aimed at the center of the British column. If such a plan were fully executed, it could not only isolate the main body of Stewart's division from its rear guard (1st Brigade) and the baggage

trains (which were several miles behind) but also force the 2nd Brigade to fight on three fronts with the risk of being defeated piecemeal.

At 9:00 AM the British guns had barely opened fire when hordes of Afghan *ghazi* swordsmen on foot rushed down the slopes of the hills on the west. They came in successive waves, stretching out beyond either flank of the British column, trying to envelop the troops. The assault comprised some 2,000 of the most devoted *ghazis*, while the main body of the Afghan army remained upon the hill to watch the results of the *ghazis*' action and follow up their exploits with subsequent drives. The *ghazis* dashed down amid the uproar of martial chants and traditional drum beats and were determined to deal with the enemy in hand-to-hand combat. Howard Hensman, who covered the battle, wrote:

> They had 500 or 600 yards to cover before they could come to close quarters with our infantry, and yet they made nothing of the distance. They advanced, or rather rushed forward, in three lines; many of the men were on horseback, and nearly all well armed with *tulwars* (swords), knives, and pistols. Some carried rifles and matchlocks, while a few—and these must, indeed, have been resolute fanatics—had simply pikes made of bayonets, or pieces of sharpened iron, fastened upon long sticks. The ground to the right and left of our troops was more open and level than that immediately in front and consequently the *ghazis*' attack broke with greatest violence upon our flanks.[42]

At the same time, a large body of Afghan horse rode along the hills, threatening the left flank and rear of Stewart's division. While the swordsmen on foot swept down on the infantry and guns, mounted bodies of Afghan fighters poured out of two ravines that joined at the foot of the hills. They charged in one mass at the 19th Bengal Lancers before the latter could get ready to meet them in an effective way. The 19th were forced back in some confusion to their right rear, disordering the 3rd Gurkha Regiment, which was on the left of the three regiments of infantry and had now formed into company squares. The infantry regiments then resumed the line formation and fired steady volleys as the swordsmen on

foot pressed their attack home with passionate fury. The Afghan's pressure forced Stewart to commit his entire reserve into the fighting line between the two batteries, which were now firing case-shot[43] and reversed shrapnel at close ranges into the swarming Afghans. But neither this nor the heavy fire from the breech-loaders of the infantry could stop the rush of the *ghazis* who fought at close quarters. At this moment the situation was critical, and the 59th Foot was ordered to retire from the depression in which it had deployed, and the regiment failed for a while to keep its line steady. The Afghan horsemen, who were pushing round the left flank, were, however, checked by the 3rd Gurkha ranks while on the right the 2nd Punjab Cavalry repeatedly charged and drove back the swordsmen on foot that had turned the right flank of the British column. The batteries of artillery took up fresh positions, and the guns were distributed in the infantry line for close support. The 59th Foot, recovering from the confusion, poured a withering fire into the *ghazi* mass. In the center, the 2nd Sikhs maintained their position with unwavering steadiness. A squadron of the 2nd Punjab Cavalry relieved the squadron of the 19th Bengal Lancers, acting as an escort to the guns, and the other two squadrons of the former regiment relieved the Lancers on the left flank.

The two squadrons of the 1st Punjab Cavalry from the 1st Brigade that arrived from the back were combined with the 19th Bengal Lancers into a cavalry detachment under Brigadier General Palliser and were moved to the right toward the Ghazni River, three miles to the east to cover the division's exposed right flank. Meanwhile, the volley fire from breech-loaders, supported by the case-shot and shrapnel of the artillery, devastated the ranks of the Afghan swordsmen. Since the main body of the Afghans held back on the hill and stood uncommitted, the *ghazis* failed to break the British line. It was an extremely unequal fight. Lacking reliable firearms, the *ghazis*' only hope was to get close to the

enemy and fight him in hand-to-hand combat. During their forward rush, the *ghazis* came within effective range of enemy rifle for 400 yards—a distance they could cover at best in four to ten minutes. Given the British infantry's rate of fire, during this time they could have been targeted by at least 3,000 rounds per minute across a one-mile frontage. So in spite of their raw valor the *ghazis* were rapidly being decimated by the British withering fire. In Hensman's words, "with what grand disregard for their lives they must have fought is shown by their charging to within thirty yards of the muzzles of Major Warter's guns, and facing case and reversed shrapnel, which at close quarters mowed them down in scores."[44]

With the arrival of a portion of the 1st Brigade Infantry Regiments, which reinforced the right-center of the British column, the situation was getting tougher for the Afghan swordsmen. Then by 9:45 AM, under the galling fire of the British rifles and the artillery barrage, the *ghazis* ran out of steam and began to retire and scattered as rapidly as they had swooped down on the British line. Meanwhile, as the retiring tribesmen were creeping off over the slopes of the hills to the west, they came under direct fire of the British heavy battery on the left, which prevented any attack being made on the left rear and the baggage column.

By 10:00 AM the battle was over, but owing to the need to protect the large parks and baggage, no pursuit was ordered, and the cavalry was recalled. The British Hazara allies, however, took advantage of the situation and pursued the fugitives to the extent they were able to. On the following day (April 20) General Stewart in a letter to Lady Stewart shared his experience of the day, stating that

> for a few minutes I and all my Staff were in great peril. The Ghazis came on, sword in hand, and a part of the line gave way before them, and to make matters worse, there was a stampede of a part of the cavalry, and everything was swept before it; at last they were rallied. . . . Some 2000 swordsmen,

> almost all Ghazis, rushed on my line, and nothing could stop them except extreme coolness and steadiness.[45]

The general later reported that 800 Afghans were left dead on the battlefield and his losses included 17 killed and 120 wounded. Other sources estimate the Afghan casualties at about 1,000 dead and about 1,000 to 1,500 wounded. “The ghazis killed,” wrote Hensman, “were all fine, handsome men, well nourished and of splendid physique, and their fanaticism had given them courage which veteran soldiers might envy. Among the dead was one woman, while twelve others were taken prisoners with arms in their hands.”[46]

The immense disparity in combat losses of the two sides reflects the unequal fight between men with swords and knives and soldiers armed with rifles and cannons. As one British officer put it, “Anyone with the semblance of a heart under khaki-jacket could not help feeling something akin to pity to see them advancing with their miserable weapons in the face of our guns and rifles, but their courage and their numbers made them formidable.”[47] The Battle of Ahmad Khel entered into the annals of the second Anglo-Afghan war as a “knife-edge victory” of Stewart’s division, who narrowly escaped defeat. Just a breakthrough into the ranks of one of the infantry regiments by a large number of *ghazis* could have disrupted the whole line. A wavering instance in the actions of the 59th British Regiment at Ahmad Khel is believed to be remembered as the “Fore and Aft” regiment in Rudyard Kipling’s “The Drums of Fore and Aft,” a story that reflects the disgrace of a battle almost lost rather than the glory of its being won.[48]

The battlefield of Ahmad Khel (locally known as the Mullah Noh Baba plain) features a large Afghan cemetery where those Afghans who fell on that bloody morning are buried. The battle generated many stories of the gallantry of those who fought to their deaths in defense of their country against a foreign invasion. General Stewart wrote that some

of the *ghazis* “feigned to be dead, and shot some of our men as they passed by.”[49] Among the prisoners, two *ghazis* continued to defy the British even during captivity. When they were promised liberty in return for quitting fighting, they just cursed all *Kafirs* (infidels) and swore to kill a *Farangi* the instant they were released.[50] In Kabul in the late 1960s, I met the elderly son of General Sher Muhammad Khan, one of the leaders of the *ghazis* at Ahmad Khel, who was severely wounded in the battle. Sher Muhammad later served in the Afghan army in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His son told me that when his father’s comrades tried to take him home, he consented to evacuation only on the condition that he should be carried away with his face toward the enemy. His kinsmen roped his body to a *charpoy* cot and secured the cot onto a camel and carried the wounded *ghazi* home with his face always toward the enemy. All this was because he did not want to show his back to the *Farangi*.

The Battle of Ahmad Khel was more than a tactical encounter. It reinforced the risks of a lengthy occupation of Afghanistan by the British army and expedited the political process of handing over the power in Kabul to an acceptable, friendly Afghan leader who would allow the withdrawal of the British army in safety and honor. The way the Afghans fought the battle at Ahmad Khel was replicated by other Afghan fighters some four months later at Maiwand, which led to a decisive victory by the Afghan fighters and a major military disaster to the British forces.

The British column left the battlefield of Ahmad Khel the same day and arrived in Ghazni on April 21, where it had to deal with another uprising of the tribesmen. Shilgar and Zurmat Districts were mobilized under the firebrand Mullah Musk-i-Alam. The British reconnaissance on April 22 reported a tribal gathering of 2,000 to 3,000 men at the Orzu and Shalez villages, six miles southeast of Ghazni. It took almost

the bulk of the division forces to defeat and scatter the Afghan concentration after heavy fighting on April 22.

Two days later, on April 24, the Kandahar force proceeded on its march toward Kabul where General Stewart assumed the overall command in northeastern Afghanistan. With the arrival of the Kandahar Division, the Kabul Field Force was increased in strength to about 18,000 combat troops.

The Exit Strategy

By early 1880, the British government of India, having achieved the objectives of its military invasion of Afghanistan, decided to withdraw its army after handing over the country's administration to a pro-British ruler. Britain kept its territorial gains on the frontier, including the Khyber and Michini Passes in the north, the Kurram Valley in the center, and the Sibi and Pishin in the south under its control. The British exit strategy was influenced by three main factors that shaped its endgame: the perceived difficulty and undesirability of keeping Afghanistan under a unified rule; the rising costs of the war precluding the continued occupation of Afghanistan; and the change of policy of the home government as the liberals came to power in the election of 1880.

With no apparent strong candidate on the scene to take over Afghanistan to British satisfaction, many British policy makers and strategic thinkers believed that finding a strong ruler to govern a unified Afghanistan and still be friendly to the British and protect its security interests was hardly possible. Nor was it deemed desirable under the circumstances. Therefore they supported the disintegration of the country into separate principalities, each with a direct relationship with the British government. "A strong, united Afghanistan was very desirable, no doubt, could we be

certain that its interests and ours would always remain identical," wrote General Roberts,

> but, in addition to the chance of its strength and unity being used against us, there was the certainty that, even if the man we might choose as Amir were to remain perfectly loyal, at his death Afghan history would repeat itself; the succession to the throne would be disputed, and the unification would have to begin all over again. For these reasons I had no hesitation in giving it as my opinion that Afghanistan should be disintegrated, and that we should not again attempt to place the whole country under any one Sovereign.[51]

Such views soon found their way into the official policy of the British government. A line of policy based on similar arguments was recommended by British India to the secretary of state in early January 1880 as the best way to secure the Indian Empire.

In the spring of 1880, Sardar Sher Ali (the cousin of Amir Sher Ali Khan), who had been appointed the governor of Kandahar by Yaqub Khan, was installed as the independent governor of Kandahar under British protection, and the policy of the disintegration of Afghanistan began to be implemented. The situation in Herat was more complicated. Sardar Ayub Khan, the younger brother of Yaqub Khan, had returned from exile in Persia and had established himself as the ruler of Herat Province. But he was hostile to the British. Turning Herat into a separate state or placing it under British control entailed the risks of antagonizing Persia, which long had a claim on the province, and driving it into a Russian alliance. So in an odd about-face from the policy of nearly half a century ago, the British government offered Herat as a Persian territory in exchange for friendship ties with Britain. Even northern Afghanistan (Afghan Turkistan) was slated to become a neutral zone. These ideas, however, were soon overtaken by events.

The increasing cost of war was reaching an alarming level. In the spring of 1880, counting the British combat forces in Kabul, Jalalabad, and Kandahar and on the lines of communication, some 57,000 men, excluding the camp

followers, were engaged in the war in Afghanistan.[52] The operation caused a persistent drain on transport and other logistic means and material. The financial cost was running into the millions and the casualties in men, animals, and material were rising.

As in the first Anglo-Afghan war, the change of government in England and the coming of the Liberals to power shifted the policy toward a rapid withdrawal from Afghanistan. When the Gladstone government took over on April 23, 1880, the decision to pull out, which had already been proposed by Viceroy Lytton, gathered momentum. The belief was that the military intervention in Afghanistan had changed the political and security situation in Afghanistan, which would subsequently safeguard the North West Frontier of British India. Therefore, it was time to end military occupation of the country. Upholding the strategic gains of the war, however, required the emergence of a strong leader in Kabul who could establish his firm rule and maintain friendly ties with the British government.

There were now two main contenders for the throne of Kabul, one coming from the north and the other from the west. Sardar Abdur Rahman Khan, an ambitious cousin of Amir Sher Ali, who had lived as a Russian pensioner in Tashkent for the past 12 years, saw the opportunity to fulfill his long-standing regal dream following the example of his father, Amir Afzal Khan, who successfully challenged Amir Sher Ali in 1865. The Russians, who prevented the sardar from returning to Afghanistan during Sher Ali's reign (in order to keep Sher Ali on their side), saw that the situation after the British invasion in 1878 was changing. They encouraged and assisted the sardar financially and provided him with 200 breech-loading rifles and other equipment to return to Afghanistan and test his fortune. In Herat, Sardar Ayub Khan possessed part of his father's army and artillery and was proclaimed amir by the *ulema* (religious scholars) following the British exile of his elder brother, Amir Yaqub Khan, to

India. Toward the end of 1879, Sardar Ayub Khan sent a letter to Abdur Rahman Khan inviting him to join the sardar at Balkh and march with him against the British. Abdur Rahman Khan turned down the request, stating that he had no intention of opposing the British, knowing full well he was not strong enough to do so. He concluded by advising Ayub Khan to make his submission to the British, as opposition was useless. Abdur Rahman's answer to Ayub was reported by the former's mother in Kandahar to General Stewart, who conveyed it to the foreign secretary, adding that Abdur Rahman's family were well disposed toward the British and that there would be no difficulty in communicating with the sardar through them.[53]

While Sardar Abdur Rahman was making progress in northern Afghanistan mobilizing old allies and new recruits in support of his royal ambitions, Lord Lytton dispatched a veteran Foreign Service officer, Lepel Griffin, to Kabul. Griffin would negotiate the selection of an amir for Afghanistan who would take over the country after the withdrawal of the British forces and would rule under British stipulations. Griffin arrived in Kabul on March 18, 1880, and began canvassing various Afghan chiefs and sardars to identify a consensus choice. When the news of the arrival of Sardar Abdur Rahman Khan reached Kabul, Griffin sent him a letter on April 1 asking him to "submit to the British officers at Kabul any representations that you may desire to make to the British Government with regard to your object in entering Afghanistan."

On April 15, Sardar Abdur Rahman's response to Griffin's correspondence arrived. Abdur Rahman criticized Yaqub Khan for causing the troubles in Afghanistan and wished that the country could live in peace and friendship with the two great empires of Russia and Britain, adding that "for my tribesmen are unable to struggle with the empires, and are ruined by want of commerce; and we hope of your friendship that, sympathizing with and assisting the people of

Afghanistan, you will place them under the honorable protection of the two powers." This, he wrote, "is my wish; for the rest it is yours to decide."[54] The friendly and seemingly sober tone of Abdur Rahman Khan's message was well received by the viceroy, which was reflected in Griffin's next correspondence to the sardar two weeks later, on April 30. "The British Government does not desire to annex Afghanistan," he wrote,

> and will withdraw its armies from Kabul as soon as it has established an Amir who is willing to live in peace and friendship with the Government. This you are ready to do, and consequently the Viceroy and Governor General, believing you to be the most capable of the Barakzai family, and most approved by the people of Afghanistan, offers you the Amirship, and will assist you to establish yourself and supply your immediate wants.[55]

This correspondence was sent at a time when signs of anti-British resistance were violently expressed at Ahmad Khel near Ghazni and were building steadily in Herat under the leadership of Sardar Ayub Khan. At this time, the Indian government was equally anxious to retire from Kabul in the ensuing autumn, or, if possible, earlier, and to withdraw also from Kandahar as soon as the rule of the *Wali* Sher Ali Khan should be established there.

On June 14, 1880, Griffin communicated the demands of the British government, which included the control of the external relations of Afghanistan by the British, placing Kandahar under a separate governor (*Wali*), and the enactment of the Treaty of Gandamak signed with ex-amir Yaqub Khan regarding the British frontier with Afghanistan. "The Kabul ruler can have no political relations with any foreign power except the English," the document read,

> and if any such foreign power should attempt to interfere in Afghanistan, and if such interference should lead to unprovoked aggression on the Kabul ruler, then the British Government will be prepared to aid him, if necessary, to repel it, provided that he follows the advice of the British Government in regard to his external relations. . . . The whole province of Kandahar has been placed under a separate ruler, except Pishin and Sibi, which are retained in British possession. Consequently, the Government is not able to enter into

> any negotiations with you on these points, nor in respect to arrangements with regard to the north-west frontier, which were concluded with the ex-Amir Mohammad Yaqub Khan.

With regard to the rest of the country, the communication added, “With these reservations the British Government are willing that you should establish over Afghanistan (including Herat, the possession of which cannot be guaranteed to you, though Government are not disposed to hinder measures which you may take to obtain possession of it) as complete and extensive authority as has hitherto been exercised by any Amir of your family.”[56]

Abdur Rahman writes that in his “short” response on June 22, he did not give his consent to the separation of Kandahar from the kingdom, but he did not take serious action until the problem was resolved by the emerging situation in the south following the Battle of Maiwand. Abdur Rahman’s position rapidly grew stronger and stronger, and he was proclaimed amir by the people in Charikar on July 20. Two days later, at a formal gathering in Kabul the sardar was announced as amir with the *Khutba* read in his name.

Prior to this, in May 1880, Sardar Sher Ali was installed as *Wali* of Kandahar under British protection. The situation reopened the rivalry between the house of the Kandahar sardars and the clan of Amir Dost Mohammad, which was now led by Abdur Rahman. The situation, however, changed with the defeat and destruction of the British brigade at Maiwand (July 27) a week after the official enthronement of Abdur Rahman as the amir of Kabul. Two days after the Ayub Khan victory at Maiwand, Griffin rode to Amir Abdur Rahman Khan’s camp at Zimma, 16 miles north of Kabul, to finalize the arrangements for the departure of the British army from Kabul. He asked the amir to bid farewell to the British commander in Kabul and take measures to help the British columns on their return journey home. The amir demanded that after General Roberts left with his forces to Kandahar, he would go to Kabul to see General Stewart off on his

journey to India via Peshawar. Meanwhile, the amir appointed several sardars to accompany the British columns and provide transport and ensure the safe passage of the British columns. General Roberts left Kabul on August 8, leading his expanded division to Kandahar to help the Kandahar garrison, which was besieged by Sardar Ayub Khan following his victory at Maiwand. General Stewart and Lepel Griffin left on August 10 after a brief meeting with Amir Abdur Rahman Khan in Kabul, who was at hand to bid them farewell.

The Battle of Maiwand

The departure of Lieutenant General Stewart with his division from Kandahar to Kabul in April 1880 left Kandahar exposed to Sardar Ayub Khan's contemplated advance from Herat to the province.[57] The sardar's plans, which were delayed for a while due to internal conflict between his Herati and Kabuli regiments, were renewed. In spring 1880, it became apparent that Ayub Khan was preparing a large force of infantry, cavalry, and artillery with the apparent goal of seizing Kandahar. On June 9, Ayub Khan's advance guard left Herat, heading toward Kandahar. The main body followed six days later. On June 21, the British learned of the movement and on June 30 ordered a brigade to advance from Kandahar to the banks of the Helmand River to prevent Ayub Khan's force from crossing. On July 2, a composite brigade commanded by Brigadier General G. R. S. Burrows moved out, and by July 11 it had deployed on the Helmand River.

Ayub Khan was trying to avoid a decisive engagement with Burrows's brigade and to move directly on Kandahar. He established a cavalry screen on his right flank to check the British brigade's movement from the south (Khushk-i-Nakhud). Burrows was tasked with preventing Ayub's passage to Kandahar or possibly to Ghazni by attacking him

on the approaches to Kandahar. This left the British uncertain as to the time and place of the battle. They had to monitor the enemy's movement closely to choose the right time, place, and tactical formation to intercept the marching Afghan columns.

The British brigade consisted of two cavalry regiments, including 316 troopers from the 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry and 260 troopers of the 3rd Sind Horse; two regiments of Bombay Native infantry, which were the 1st Bombay-the Grenadiers (648 troops) and the 30th Bombay, also known as Jacob's Rifles (625 troops); the British 66th Infantry, minus two companies (516 troops); half of the 2nd Company of Bombay Sappers and Miners; and the E Battery, B Brigade, Royal Horse Artillery (191 men). This numbered 2,599 combat soldiers, six 9-pounder guns, and about 3,000 service and transport personnel.

The baggage trains were enormous. Besides normal supplies, additional ordnance and ammunition were carried, and the commissariat was augmented for a 30-day stay. Officers' kit and equipment were not limited. More than 3,000 transport animals—ammunition ponies, mules, donkeys, bullocks, and hundreds of camels—were required to move the baggage. The animals required drivers, usually locally contracted Kandaharis. There were many other noncombatants, including cooks, water carriers, tailors, servants, and stretcher-bearers.[58]

The British force was to join a larger Afghan army led by Sardar Sher Ali Khan, the Kandahar governor. It had more than 6,000 soldiers, armed with British Snider rifles, four 6-pounder British smoothbore guns, and two 12-pounder British smoothbore howitzers.[59] British intelligence calculated the opposing force of Ayub Khan at 10 infantry regiments, 2,500 cavalry, and six batteries of guns—6,000 to 8,000 men in all.[60]

The British brigade had orders not to cross the Helmand River. It was the hottest time of the year, and the river proved no obstacle, being practically dry and passable at numerous sites. Sardar Sher Ali's Afghan army from Kandahar had pushed across the Helmand and took up positions on the far bank at Girishk. As the combined force waited for the Afghan army from Herat, the governor's troops became increasingly restless. It became clear that their loyalty was suspect, and Burrows and Sher Ali agreed to bring them back across the river and disarm them. Before this could be done, the Afghan infantry and artillery mutinied and moved to join the army from Herat. Much of the cavalry remained loyal. The British brigade launched a pursuit across the Helmand against the mutineers and recaptured the guns but not the artillery horses. Burrows formed an ad hoc battery with the captured smoothbores, but lacking artillery horses, he evacuated only 50 rounds per gun. The rest of the artillery ammunition was thrown into deep water holes in the Helmand River.[61] In spite of the desertion of the Sher Ali army, the British command in Kandahar was still overoptimistic about the ability of the Burrows column to block the advance of Ayub Khan. In his journal, Brigadier General Brooke entered on July 14, "Ayub Khan is said to have with him 1,800 cavalry and 4,000 infantry, and 30 guns, so General Burrows' force of 2,500 men and 6 guns has not much to fear."[62]

General Burrows was 80 miles from Kandahar with 25 miles of waterless desert immediately to his rear. The Helmand river line was now indefensible, and Ayub Khan could cross almost anywhere. The combined Kandahar force, before the desertion of Sher Ali's levies, had been approximately equal to the Herat force. But the latter was growing from the addition of mutineers and local adherents. Consequently, Burrows withdrew some 35 miles to Khushk-i-Nakhud—where two of the five routes to Kandahar met and from where the other three could be reached readily. Burrows

closed on Khushk-i-Nakhud on July 17, the same day Ayub Khan's cavalry reached Burrows's previous position on the Helmand. Burrows was a three-day march from Kandahar. If he withdrew to the Kandahar fortifications, Ayub Khan's force might bypass Kandahar to take Ghazni and cut communications between Kabul and Kandahar. Burrows decided to hold his position and defeat Ayub Khan's advance guard before the main body could close.

With the arrival of Ayub Khan's advance guard, under *Loynab* (chief minister) Khushdil Khan, on the Helmand's east bank, both sides intensified their reconnaissance. The British intelligence network, run by the political officer Lieutenant Colonel Oliver St. John, faced obstacles from the growing anti-British popular uprising in the region. The brigade's daily reconnaissance patrols to Sangbur, Garmab (about 13 miles northeast and north of Kushk-i-Nakhud), and the Arghandab River in the south could safely monitor the approaches to Kandahar for only a brief time during the day. Although British scouts detected the presence of small elements of the Afghan army at Sangbur, Garmab, and Maiwand three or four days before the battle, Burrows and St. John failed to determine their enemy's whereabouts. In fact the advance guard of the Afghan army arrived in Garmab on July 25, while a number of its forward elements and a group of *ghazis* reached Maiwand the same day. The following day Ayub Khan arrived in Sangbur just after the British patrol left the place. Ayub intended to march the following day (July 27) to Maiwand, which by then would be secured by his advance party.

On July 26, British spies reported that Ayub Khan's advanced forces were in Maiwand and that the size of Ayub Khan's force was 3,500 regular infantry, 2,000 cavalry, 34 cannons, 1,500 mutineers, and 3,500 irregular volunteers. It was evident that Ayub Khan was using the northern approach. The spies further reported that the main body should close on Maiwand on July 27.[63] Burrows discounted

the intelligence estimates on the Afghan force's size and its main body's arrival time. Early on July 27 the British brigade began to move north toward Maiwand. There has been no balanced study of the correlation of forces in the Maiwand battle. Most British studies apply different criteria in calculating the overall strength of the opposing combat and supporting forces. British studies often suggest that a British brigade of about 2,500 faced an army of 15,000 to 25,000 Afghan regulars and irregulars. This assessment is misleading because it counts thousands of unarmed Afghan service and support elements, civilian camp followers, and curious villagers as part of the Afghan combatants, while discounting more than 3,000 British service details and transport crews. Further, the correlation is based on pure numbers without factoring in qualitative aspects. A balanced correlation of forces considers both quantity and quality (weapons effectiveness, training, organization, discipline, morale, command, and logistics).

The British force totaled 2,599 combat soldiers and more than 3,000 service and transport details. The Afghan army that left Herat in early June was led by professional military and tribal leaders. Among them General (*Naeb-Salar*) Hafizullah Khan Logari, Taj Mohammad Khan Ghilzai, and Loynab Khushdil Khan were the top military advisors to Ayub Khan. The army was a combined force of infantry, cavalry, and artillery forces.

The infantry included nine regular regiments with a total of 4,100 bayonets. They were organized in three brigades:

- 1st Brigade, commanded by Taj Mohammad Khan (Tajik), Mir Akhor, comprising three Kabuli infantry regiments, each of 500 men with a total of 1,500;
- 2nd Brigade commanded by Saidal Khan (Pashtun), including two regular Kabuli and one regular Kandahari regiments, each of 500 men with a total of 1,500;

- 3rd Brigade, under Ghafar Khan (Tajik), including three regular Herati infantry regiments of 366 men, each with a total of 1,100.

The Cavalry Brigade commanded by Abdur Rahman Khan (Rika) was made up of three regular cavalry regiments of 300 troopers, each with a total of 900. The artillery under Ahmad Gul (Kabuli) included one mountain battery (mule) and four field batteries (horse), each battery of 100 gunners with a total of 500 gunners and 30 artillery guns. The irregular contingent consisted of 1,500 Herati and 500 Durrani horsemen (*sawars*).[64] Thus these elements added up to 7,500 men of all ranks. Later, some 500 tribal horsemen who defected from Sardar Sher Ali's army and about 1,000 irregular infantry also joined the Ayub's army in Farah. Many tribal warriors and local inhabitants also joined Ayub Khan's forces as they moved from Herat to Maiwand. These *ghazis* were poorly armed with locally made or old European muskets. Most carried only swords and spears or were unarmed and followed the army to share the glory and spoils of a holy war (*Jihad*). Some British authors estimate the number of these *ghazis* as high as 15,000, which official accounts discount as an exaggeration.[65]

In small arms, the British infantry regiments had significant superiority over Afghan foot soldiers since the British soldiers were armed with breech-loading rifles. The 66th was armed with the Martini-Henry rifle, the British Native infantry had the older Snider rifles, and the cavalry had the Snider carbine. The Martini-Henry rifle was a real technological edge for the British force. With a maximum effective range of 400 yards, this .45-caliber weapon could fire 12 to 15 rounds per minute. The Snider was a pattern 1853 rifled musket that had been converted to breech-loading and could fire up to 10 .557-caliber rounds per minute out to an effective range of 400 yards. The British infantry units were trained to conduct area fire out to 2,000 yards.

The opposing five Kabuli infantry regiments were armed with 1853 Enfield muzzle-loading rifles that fired two to three shots per minute. The Herati and Kandahari regiments carried locally produced copies of Enfield and Snider rifles with a 300-yard maximum effective range.[66] The irregular troops were armed with an assortment of ancient Tower, Brown Bess, and Brunswick flintlock muskets (possibly seized during the first Anglo-Afghan war) or primitive Afghan muskets with a 50- to 80-yard maximum effective range and a rate of fire of one shot per two minutes.[67] In terms of small-arms firepower, the correlation of forces was at least 8 to 1 in favor of the British infantry.

However, the Afghan army had better artillery, particularly its six very effective 12-pound, breech-loading, 3-inch rifled Armstrong guns. Their rate of fire was at least five rounds per minute. The Afghan artillery also included 16 6-pounder field guns, two 12-pounder howitzers, two 4.5-inch howitzers, and four 3-pounder field guns—all smoothbore weapons. The British artillery had six 9-pounder muzzle-loading rifled guns and six smoothbore pieces—four 6-pounder field guns and two 12-pounder howitzers. The horse artillery's 9-pounder field guns could fire shrapnel, case-shot, and high explosive out to 3,500 yards.[68] During the battle, the Afghan artillery's effectiveness significantly increased through its continuous maneuver, eventually bringing some guns to 500 yards from the British line. Artillery played a dominant role in the battle.

The British troops had better training and discipline and were supported by an organized logistic system. The Afghan army was an odd assortment of fighters with differing levels of combat skills, armament, and organization. They were united only by common purpose. However, there was no guarantee that the army would stay together for long since, in the absence of a viable logistic support system, most of the combatants were fending for themselves. Even the regular units depended on local supplies. Not surprisingly,

after the battle thousands of *ghazi*s left to carry their wounded and dead to their homes or just celebrated the victory and left. The British brigade's overall combat effectiveness was much higher than the Afghan army's. What determined the outcome of the battle, however, was not only the firepower but the Afghan forces' bold maneuver backed by Ayub Khan's effective command and control. The Afghan maneuver changed the correlation of forces at the decisive moment when highly motivated *ghazis*' swords and spears in close quarters were more effective than modern rifles.

At 7:00 AM, a 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry squadron and two guns led the British column out of camp. The brigade staff and the rest of the 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry and two more guns were 500 yards behind the advance party. Infantry regiments followed in parallel columns with the smoothbore battery and sappers between the columns. The 3rd Sind Horse and two more guns composed the rear guard, while a mixed force of cavalry and infantry escorted the slow-moving baggage.[69] The main body of Ayub Khan's force left Sangbur that morning, moving in several columns toward Maiwand. The cavalry regiments and irregular horsemen covered the right flank, and infantry regiments moved in regimental columns on the left. The Afghan horse artillery's 24 guns moved with the infantry as did the six mountain guns mounted on mules. Large groups of *ghazi*s moved from different directions toward Maiwand.

It was a hot day, with the temperature reaching 120 degrees Fahrenheit by late morning and the prevailing haze limiting visibility to under a mile. As the British column reached halfway between Moshak and Karezak (six miles south of Maiwand), Brigadier General Burrows learned that Ayub Khan was moving in force on Maiwand. As the column moved near Mahmudabad village, further intelligence indicated that Afghan columns were moving across the

British front from west to east six to seven miles away.[70] Burrows decided to engage the Afghan force while it was on the march. He left the baggage at Mahmudabad, and the column turned northwest onto a barren plain cut by several gullies (*nullah*). On the far side of the village was a large ravine, 15 to 25 feet deep and 50 to 100 feet wide, which ran northeasterly. Farther to the north, near Khig village, a narrower ravine ran northwest, which later provided cover for the Afghan infantry.[71]

As the British column veered to the left, Lieutenant H. MacLaine quickly led his two Royal Horse Artillery guns from the advance party across the ravine to the plain. He took up a firing position about a mile beyond the ravine and opened fire at a range of 1,700 yards. It was 10:45 AM, and MacLaine was firing into the middle or rear of the Afghan column. Another horse artillery gun section arrived and took up positions about 200 yards from the ravine. As the British column deployed, it formed two lines behind the guns with the Grenadiers on the left of the artillery battery, four companies of the Jacob's Rifles to the right, and the 66th Foot on the extreme right. Four companies of the Jacob's Rifles were in reserve. The ad hoc smoothbore battery set up to the left rear of the Royal Horse Artillery. The cavalry regiments were deployed on the left rear in column formation. A mixed detachment of infantry and cavalry protected the baggage.

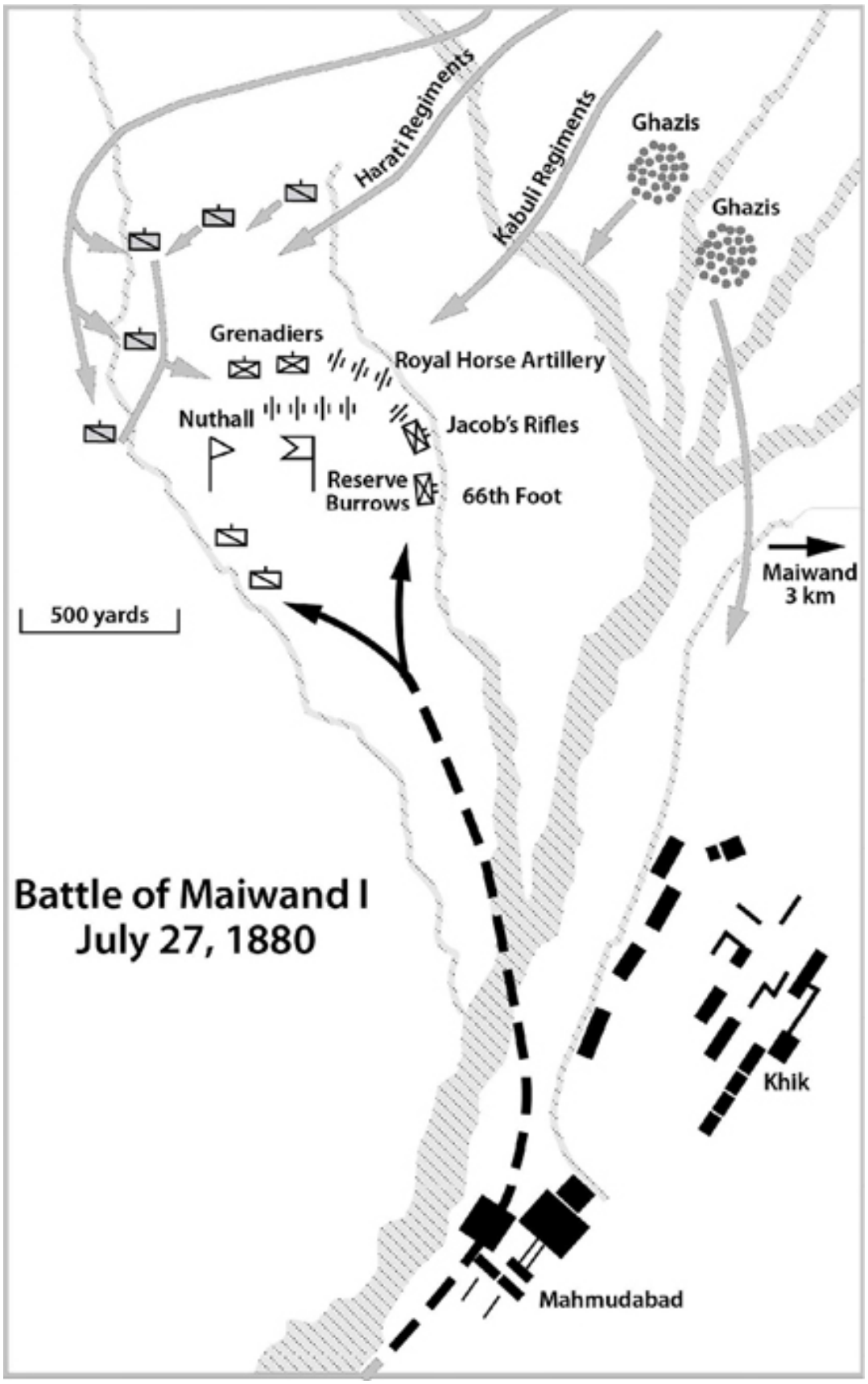
Although the British brigade forestalled the Afghan force in opening fire and deploying infantry columns into combat formation—two key successes in meeting battle—it failed to exploit tactical initiative. The opening artillery fire was handicapped by an insufficient number of guns and poor visibility, while their tactical advantage in early deployment was lost as they went on the defense on open terrain, thus surrendering the maneuver initiative to the Afghans. Options open to Burrows included a bold attack at the flank of the

Afghan columns before they could deploy or a defense along the ravine at the edge of Mahmudabad and Khig villages. The formation taken up by the brigade did not support either offensive or defensive action

The Afghan army detected the British brigade's movement when it neared Mahmudabad. As the British column turned left to deploy for battle, the Afghan command matched the move and veered right. The Afghan artillery rushed to the fight as the front of the column began to turn around and retrace its steps from Maiwand. As the Afghan regiments deployed, they saw the British forces lined up on the defense with their flanks open and vulnerable. Ayub Khan decided to attack the open enemy flanks by deploying cavalry to the enemy left and moving irregular infantry and *ghazis* to the right, where a ravine offered protection. He deployed regular infantry regiments in the center and ordered his 30 guns to take up positions on a line from the center to the left flank. Given the varying speed of infantry, cavalry, and artillery, Ayub's force deployed into combat formation in a coordinated manner. The terrain allowed the irregular infantry and *ghazis* to threaten the British right flank, while the British left flank, with its wider space for maneuver, was ideal ground for cavalry action. The Afghan deployment of regular infantry in the center was designed to maintain the stability of the Afghan line.

About 30 minutes after British guns fired the first shots, leading Afghan artillery pieces moved into range and began pounding the deploying British line. As more Afghan guns arrived, they moved into one of five firing locations that delivered punishing fire on the British formation. The 66th and Jacob's Rifles were partially protected since they were lying down behind a small fold in the ground. They suffered lightly during the artillery duel, but the Royal Horse Artillery battery, the Grenadiers, and two Jacob's Rifles companies at the extreme left had little cover and suffered heavily. Ayub Khan not only had more guns than the British, his six breech-

loading Armstrong guns also fired heavier shells. The Afghan artillery was firing so effectively that it was falsely rumored to be manned by Russian gunners.[72] It took almost another half hour before the Afghan irregular infantry and cavalry deployed in combat formation about 800 yards from the British position. It was now a little past noon.


Harati Regiments
Kabuli Regiments
Ghazis
Ghazis
Grenadiers
Royal Horse Artillery
Nuthall
Jacob's Rifles
Reserve
Burrows
66th Foot
Maiwand
3 km
500 yards
Battle of Maiwand I
July 27, 1880
Khik
Mahmudabad

The Battle of Maiwand I, July 27, 1880.

The *ghazis* initiated the first Afghan infantry attack on the British line against the 66th Foot. Highly motivated by religious and patriotic fervor, large numbers of devout *ghazis* in white garments led the assault.[73] The 66th with its superior firepower successfully repelled the successive waves of the attack while inflicting heavy losses on the *ghazis*, whose rudimentary muskets, swords, and spears were no match for the Martini-Henrys. The British line was firing in company volleys starting at 1,200 yards—a range at which the Afghan combatants could not return effective fire.[74] At the same time, Burrows ordered two 12-pounder howitzers from the smoothbore battery to reinforce the 66th. The artillery barrage and the Martini-Henrys' withering fire pinned down the *ghazis*, who took shelter in the ravine facing the British right flank.

On the British left, regular Kabuli cavalry regiments and irregular Herati horsemen in loose formations threatened the British open flank. Burrows ordered the Grenadiers to wheel their two left companies slightly back and committed his entire infantry reserve to extend the fighting line. Further, he shifted the two 12-pounder howitzers from the right flank back to the center. Intensified British fire forced the Afghan cavalry to fall back and maintain an 800-yard distance from the British troops to be out of Snider-rifle and carbine-area fire range.

Meanwhile, Afghan artillery pieces moved forward to firing positions closer to the enemy as Afghan regular infantry regiments, in columns and squares, approached the British center. Irregular troops and the *ghazis* accompanied the Afghan regiments. The Afghan artillery displacement slowed their bombardment, and Burrows decided to attack the Afghan infantry to break up its deployment for combat. At about half past noon, Burrows ordered the Grenadiers and the two Jacob's Rifles companies at its left to advance 500

yards and break up the impending attack with volleys of rifle fire. The regiment had barely moved 200 yards when heavy artillery fire forced it to halt, lie down, and take up the defense.

At this time, the Afghan infantry had reached a line a half-mile from the British positions, with the Herati regiments facing the Grenadiers and the Kabuli regiments advancing against the Jacob's Rifles. The British commander ordered his troops to repel the impending Afghan attack by rifle fire. As the Heratis reached a line 800 yards from the British positions, the Grenadiers opened up with a regimental volley, causing heavy losses in the Afghan ranks. Despite successive attempts, the outgunned Herati regiments failed to resume the advance and were forced to retreat out of the Sniders' effective range. Kabuli regiments attacking the Jacob's Rifles met similar Snider rifle fire and were forced to halt.

During the next hour and a half, the Afghan command undertook a major force regrouping to resume the attack. Afghan sources describe this as the most critical phase of the battle. Troops had suffered heavy casualties, and many wounded needed immediate attention. The whole army was tired and thirsty after a long march. Many tribal irregulars wanted to evacuate their wounded and dead comrades from the battlefield.[75] Afghans speak of a legendary heroine named Malala who, with a number of other Afghan women, helped *ghazis* on the battlefield. Reciting traditional patriotic ballads, Malala instilled a new spirit of valor and perseverance into the tired tribal warriors.[76]

Afghan forces Commander in Chief Lieutenant General Hafizullah Khan halted the offensive temporarily. He regrouped his forces, which included moving artillery closer to the front line, building up infantry against the British center for the main attack, and threatening the British flanks to shift the enemy's attention.[77] While the main Afghan

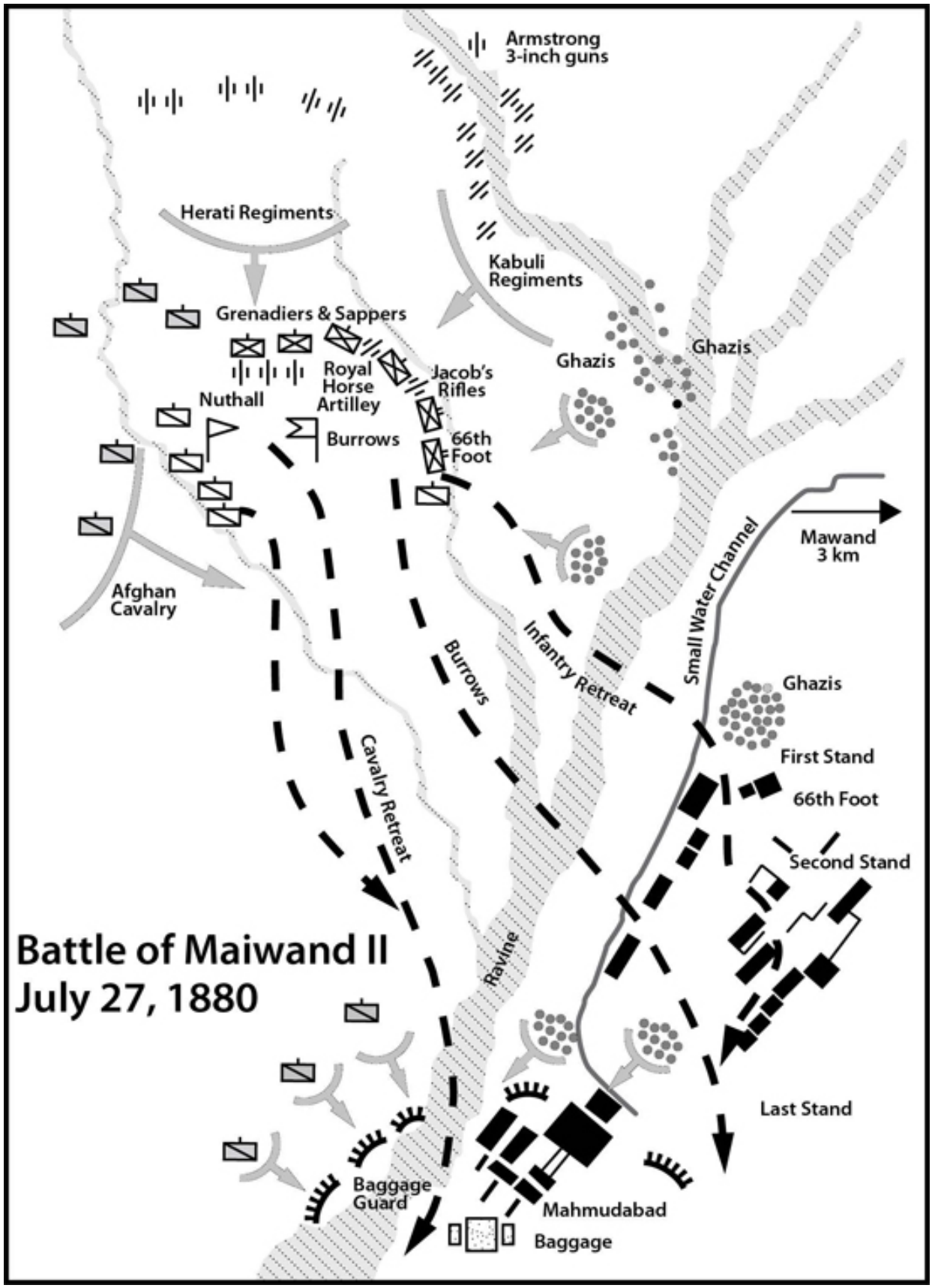
forces were regrouping, swarms of *ghazis* and irregular cavalry threatened the British baggage train at Mahmudabad village. This threat tied up a significant number of British foot and mounted soldiers throughout the battle.

Culmination and British Rout

Around 1:00 PM, a large Afghan buildup confronted the Grenadiers. *Ghazis* moved to the British rear through the ravines. At 1:30 PM, the British smoothbore battery withdrew since it was out of ammunition. This affected the morale of the Native infantry on the left flank. While the British line suffered from continuous Afghan artillery fire, it repulsed the Afghan cavalry on the left flank. Meanwhile, the Afghan army adjusted its combat formation for the offensive, bringing the artillery pieces as close as 500 to 600 yards to British positions, some guns even closer.

Between 2:00 PM and 2:30 PM, the fire from the Afghan guns diminished. The British hoped the Afghans were out of ammunition, but it was a prelude to an all-out attack. At about 2:30 PM, dense masses of irregulars supported by regular infantry rose out of the flanking ravine and fell on the British center and left. The Heratis hit the Grenadiers, and the Kabulis engaged the Jacob's Rifles. Masses of *ghazis*, some dressed in suicidal "white shrouds," spearheaded the attack. The British infantry fire that had kept the Afghans at bay failed to check the *ghazis*' massed rush.[78] The two Jacob's Rifles companies on the left came under enormous pressure. Having lost all their officers, the companies broke and fled to the Grenadiers, who were facing Afghans at close quarters. At that distance the Sniders and carbines were not as effective as the Afghans' close-combat weapons. As the left wing was about to dissolve, the Royal Horse Artillery battery began to withdraw. The Afghans captured two guns. The artillery's withdrawal led to the retreat of the Grenadiers

and the Jacob’s Rifles, which fell back on the left-hand companies of the 66th.


Armstrong
3-inch guns
Herati Regiments
Kabuli
Regiments
Grenadiers & Sappers
Royal
Horse
Artilley
Jacob's
Rifles
Nuthall
Burrows
66th
Foot
Ghazis
Ghazis
Afghan
Cavalry
Mawand
3 km
Small Water Channel
Infantry Retreat
Burrows
Cavalry Retreat
Ghazis
First Stand
66th Foot
Second Stand
Ravine
Last Stand
Baggage
Guard
Mahmudabad
Baggage
Battle of Maiwand II
July 27, 1880

As the British line was fast dissolving, Burrows ordered a cavalry charge. But the poorly led action failed to stabilize the line, and the cavalry retreated toward Mahmudabad village. Since the action failed to stabilize the line, and the cavalry retreated and was split into small pockets from the outset, it was unable to concentrate effectively at the decisive moment. The retreating Native infantry fell back onto the ranks of the 66th, and the British formation collapsed. Under intensifying pressure, elements of Jacob's Rifles and part of the Grenadiers retired to Mahmudabad, while the rest of the Grenadiers and the 66th were forced off to the right toward Khik. Desperate attempts to regroup for an organized stand failed amid the chaos. Elements of the 66th made an unsuccessful stand in the Khik orchards. About 100 soldiers made a final stand in a garden on the southern edge of the village and all perished.

Burrows followed the retreating troops through Khik and, seeing the hopeless situation, ordered them to retire. By 3:00 the plain between Mahmudabad and Khushk-i-Nakhud was covered by a column of fugitives heading south toward Kandahar. The British suffered most of their losses during the retreat, although it would have been even worse if the Afghan army had not stopped for water and to loot the bodies and baggage train. The British lost 1,757 killed, including 971 combatants, 331 followers, and 455 transport followers and drivers; 175 were wounded. Other losses were 7 guns, 1,000 rifles, 2,425 transport animals, more than 200 horses, 278,200 rifle bullets, and 448 artillery shells.[79] The Afghan forces lost 1,250 regular soldiers and 800 to 1,500 irregular fighters.

As the tiding of the disaster reached Kandahar early on July 28, immediately Brigadier General Brooke, commander of the 2nd Infantry Brigade of the Kandahar Force, collected a small force of one cavalry troop, two guns, and four infantry

companies and started out from Kandahar to help the fugitives in. He fought his way to Kohdaman, some nine miles from the city, and helped a stream of wounded men. In the words of the general,

> the gun carriages, alas, reduced by two, which had been lost, covered with sick, wounded, dead and dying, while the wretched horses, dying themselves of thirst and fatigue, were hardly able to drag them along. Many poor fellows, wounded almost to death, trying with a terrible anxiety to cling to the back of a horse or a camel, knowing too well the fate that would await them if they failed to keep their seats.[80]

The Maiwand battle is characterized by the absence of well-defined tactical-operational coordination on both sides. Ayub compromised his operational objective by becoming decisively engaged with a smaller force before reaching Kandahar. He could have changed the course of the war by blocking Burrows's brigade with a reinforced advance detachment while moving the main force directly to Kandahar, where the British defenses were weakened. Even after he defeated the British forces at Maiwand, Ayub failed to turn his tactical success into operational gains. He did not pursue the retreating British forces or strike unprepared British forces in Kandahar. It took Ayub eight days to move from Maiwand to Kandahar. By then, he faced a more organized defense.

Similarly, British forces failed to mass operationally, settling for tactical successes. Instead of facing Ayub in Kandahar and shifting forces from Kabul, which was at that time secure under its new ally Amir Abdur Rahman, they split their forces between Helmand, Kandahar, and Qalat. When the British finally massed operationally by moving General Roberts's division from Kabul to Kandahar at the end of August, they defeated Ayub on September 1, 1880. This could have been done without sacrificing Burrows's brigade in late July. Tactically, the task organization of the British brigade was not compatible with stand-alone combat. Burrows's brigade initially was tasked and tailored to back up

Sardar Sher Ali's forces that were deployed on the Helmand River to block Ayub's advance. However, once Sher Ali's army defected to Ayub's side, the British mission changed to fighting the entire Herat army without major reinforcement, a recipe for failure.

According to British sources, Burrows's brigade shot 382,881 rounds of rifle ammunition during three hours of intensive combat, approximately 2,000 rounds per minute—enormous firepower on a nineteenth-century battlefield. The fire halted the attack of overwhelming numbers of the Afghan troops. However, the lack of maneuver and failure to use terrain undermined the fire's effectiveness, and the British line dissolved.

Maiwand was one of the major military disasters of the Victorian era. On January 22, 1879, a British force at Isandlwana lost 1,700 men during the Zulu wars. "It is impossible," wrote a veteran of Maiwand, "not to draw a parallel between our fearful disaster and that of Isandlwana—the same overweening confidence in our invincibility, the same contempt of an unknown foe, the same attempt at scientific strategy, when the simplest old-fashioned British tactics would have won the day."[81] These two defeats reverberated through Britain with much the same impact as the 7th Cavalry's defeat at Little Big Horn in 1876, where 244 US soldiers lost their lives.

The saga of Maiwand is eulogized equally in the Afghan and British memory. Malala is one of the most celebrated names in Afghanistan, known to have been a young heroine at the battlefield who with a group of other female fighters inspired the tired and exhausted *ghazis* on that hot day of July. There are many patriotic poems attributed to Malala. The legend has it that at a critical moment the Afghan Jeanne d'Arc raised her head cloth as a banner and shouted, "If you fail to be martyred at Maiwand, by God, my love, you will live only a disgraceful life." Malala's grave is now a shrine in her native village Khig (Khik).

The last stand of the 66th Foot (later named Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment) is lionized for its exceptional gallantry in Maiwand. The regiment's museum (the Rifles) in Salisbury, England, displays the artifacts from that fateful day of July 1880. It includes among other things Sergeant Kelly's stuffed dog Bobbie of Maiwand, which survived the battle and returned home to be decorated by the queen. Maiwand inspired a number of short stories, including those of Sherlock Holmes where his fictitious companion, Doctor Watson, is identified with Maiwand, where he is said to have been wounded. It is believed that Watson represents the 66th Regiment's Medical Officer, Surgeon Major Alexander Francis Preston. Finally, we find the reflection of the Battle of Maiwand in Rudyard Kipling's "That Day" chant:

> Ole companies was lookin' for the nearest road to slope; It were just a bloomin' knock-out an' our fault.[82]

One result of the British defeat at Maiwand was Great Britain's decision in 1895 to abolish the separate Presidency Armies (such as the Bombay Army) and focus recruitment among the so-called martial races of Northern India—the Sikhs, Punjabis, and Gurkhas. However, the basic British colonial army system and expeditionary procedures remained intact and continued, with good results and bad, through World War II.

The Siege of Kandahar

The defeat of the Burrows brigade at Maiwand left the British garrison in Kandahar seriously threatened by the advance of Ayub Khan to the walled garrison city. Alarmed by the impending Afghan attack, the British command saw no better alternative for its relatively small force but to defend behind the walls of Kandahar. The garrison on July 28 numbered 4,360 combat troops, including the survivors of

Maiwand. The nearest relief forces were hundreds of miles away in Kabul and in Quetta, and the garrison had to tough out the situation for a considerable period until help arrived. As the defenses of the cantonment, located west of the city, were inadequate and were dominated by adjacent hills, the structure was abandoned, and the whole force was withdrawn into the walled city, which was about four miles in perimeter and had four main and two minor gates.[83] The height of the walls varied between 18 and 25 feet with a 12- to 14-foot width at the parapet.

British military norms required about 18,000 men to defend such a long line.[84] But there was no better choice. In order to ensure protection against the possible hostility of the Kandahar citizens against the British occupiers, the British drove thousands of the populace out of the walled city. The population of Kandahar at that time was estimated at 30,000, half of which were men. From this amount 12,000 people were forced to leave the city. In order to improve the defenses, buildings and enclosures providing cover to the besiegers near the city walls were razed, gun positions on the wall were constructed, gaps were repaired, and obstacle were established at key points. The sick, ammunition, the heavy guns not expected to be used, and the public and private property of the regiments were moved to the citadel located near the Eidgah Gate. Meanwhile, the garrison dispatched reconnaissance parties to watch the approaches to the city. The reconnaissance parties skirmished daily with the Afghan advance bodies.

The Afghan army began to pour into the Kandahar plain incrementally during the last days of July and the first week of August. On August 8, Afghan artillery opened fire on the citadel from the so-called Piquet Hill, northwest of the city, and a few days later more guns were brought into action from the villages of Deh-Khwaja and Deh-Khati on the east and south sides, which maintained steady fire throughout the siege. On August 9, the whole of Ayub Khan’s army

encamped at the Chehel Zina heights at the north end of the Qaitul ridge to the west of old Kandahar. On August 11, the British garrison redistributed its troops along the walls with 400 to 500 troops positioned on each face and 200 troops at Chaharsu (central square) and 100 at the Top-Khana square as immediate reinforcement. The rest of the force was in reserve. During the next week, an artillery duel ensued as the Afghan guns engaged the British defenses and was answered by the guns of the garrison from the walls. On August 12, a skirmish took place between the opposing forces when elements of two British infantry regiments rushed a walled garden outside the Herat Gate with the objective of demolishing the walls. This sally killed several Afghans, including the governor of Farah. A more serious showdown, however, came on August 16, when a strong British column sallied out to attack an Afghan stronghold at Deh-Khwaja outside the eastern face of the city with disastrous results for the British forces.

The Combat Action at Deh-Khwaja

Deh-Khwaja, a sprawling cluster of houses, forts, and enclosures east of the city of Kandahar, figures prominently in the history of the Afghan resistance to foreign invasions. Just one century after the British occupation, Deh-Khwaja became the hotbed of Mujahedin resistance to the Soviet occupation of Kandahar.[85] In August 1880, the Afghan army had unevenly invested British-occupied Kandahar City. Ayub Khan’s main forces were concentrated to the west while significant hordes of *ghazis* and irregular troops were deployed to the east and south of the city at close distances to the walls. Having no sufficient cover for the besiegers, the northern front was not strongly covered, but an overlooking hill to the north threatened the citadel.

By August 13, Afghan artillery and small-arms fire at short range from the south intensified, and the situation became so menacing that the garrison commander, General Primrose, decided to launch a sortie against Deh-Khwaja. His intention was to destroy the firing positions of the Afghan forces, capture their powerful artillery, and dislodge them from the area, thereby boosting the morale of his troops, who were discouraged following the Maiwand disaster. Deh-Khwaja's westernmost buildings were an average of 800 yards from the eastern wall and were isolated from the main body of Ayub Khan's regular troops, which were encamped some four miles west of the city. The complex of honeycombed structures could only be supported from the south (today's Malajat). The village was on the main road to the south, and General Primrose felt that it was important that this road be cleared and kept open for the advance of expected reinforcements led by General Phayre from Quetta. Finally, General Primrose was anxious to know the number and caliber of the Afghan guns positioned and firing from the village. This information was necessary, as all reports from Maiwand agreed that Ayub Khan had 30 guns with him. Further, the British command expected that by silencing the Afghan guns on the east, it could then concentrate all its efforts against the main forces of Ayub Khan to the west.

On August 15, 1880, General Primrose ordered Brigadier General Brooke to attack the village of Deh-Khwaja early on the next morning with a force consisting of elements of a cavalry and an infantry brigade (1,556 troopers and soldiers) supported by the artillery on the walls. The attack launched in three columns met stiff resistance in the narrow alleys of the densely built-up area. In the words of an eyewitness: "our losses were now heavy, our infantry suffering most, as the nature of the ground gave cover to our foe while we were in the open. General Brooke, Colonel Newport, Major Trench, and Lieutenants Stayner, Marsh, and Wood were all badly hit."[86]

At this stage, when the situation became untenable, General Primrose ordered his force to retreat, and the three columns disengaged separately. In the course of the retirement, General Brooke and Captain Cruickshank were killed. The casualties were very heavy: 106 were killed and 117 were wounded (15 percent of the whole forces in a battle less than three hours). By 7:30 AM, the British forces were back in the city. One contemporary chronicler termed it a disaster almost equal in intensity to the Maiwand disaster and an instance of "ill-judged, ill-devised, and foolish combat action."[87]

Kabul to Kandahar—the Long March

The outcome of the Battle of Maiwand altered the British exit strategy. When the tidings of the destruction of the Kandahar expeditionary force at Maiwand reached Kabul on July 29 by telegraph from Simla, it changed the evacuation plan of the Kabul Field Force. Earlier it was intended that the Kabul Force would withdraw in two separate columns over two different routes. One column, under Sir Donald Stewart, would march east over the Khyber route, and the rest of the forces, under Sir Frederick Roberts, would retire through the Kurram Valley, which was held by a Bombay division, commanded by General Watson after Roberts had moved to Kabul in September 1879. The result of the Battle of Maiwand caused the British command to make operational adjustments in order to meet the requirements of the changing security situation in the south. The immediate task was to relieve Kandahar, which would soon be besieged by Ayub Khan's victorious army.

In Kabul, General Stewart and General Roberts concurred in restoring the security situation in Kandahar by the dispatch of a strong force from Kabul that Roberts volunteered to lead. The adjusted plan envisaged that the

Kurram-bound column of the Kabul Field Force should instead march south to Kandahar, relieve the garrison, defeat the Afghan force there, and then leave for India by the southern route through Quetta. On August 3, Viceroy Lord Ripon authorized the dispatch of the Kabul column to Kandahar commanded by General Roberts. Meanwhile, instructions were given to General Phayre to join the Kabul column in the upcoming operation in Kandahar if he got there in time.

In a few days, General Roberts formed his corps d'elite, putting together a strong column named the Kabul-Kandahar Field Force. It had 12 infantry regiments (organized into an infantry division), one cavalry brigade, and three mountain artillery batteries (18 guns). The infantry division commanded by Major General Ross consisted of three infantry brigades, each made up of one European and three Native infantry regiments. They were commanded by Brigadier Generals Macpherson, Baker, and Macgregor. The cavalry brigade under Brigadier General Gough consisted of one European regiment (9th Lancers) and three Native regiments (3rd Bengal, 3rd Punjab, and the Central India Horse). The total force numbered 9,989 combat troops, of whom 2,835 were Europeans, plus over 8,000 followers and 2,300 horses and gun mules and 8,590 transport animals, consisting of mules, ponies, and donkeys.

The columns set out on the long march on August 9 in brigade columns. They moved through the Logar Valley, swinging west to Saidabad and Shashgao, where on August 14 all the division concentrated. The columns reached Ghazni on August 15 with the daily average march being 14 miles—an impressive performance given the long length of the columns and the uneven pace of march of various elements. The division left Ghazni on August 16 without a single day of rest and reached Qalat (Kalat-i-Ghilzai) on August 23 after covering 136 miles from Ghazni in eight days with a daily average march of 17 miles. The fast pace of the

march was taking its toll with soldiers, who were falling sick at the rate of 500 a day.

In Qalat, the British garrison evacuated their cantonment to join the Kabul force after handing over the city to a Tokhi chief, Mohammad Sadiq Khan. Two days later, when Roberts's column reached Tirandaz, he received a letter from the Kandahar garrison commander, General Primrose, informing him that Sardar Ayub Khan had lifted the siege with the approach of the Kabul force and had taken up defensive positions along the Arghandab River between the Baba Wali Kotal on the northeast and Sheikh Chela to the west. Finally, on the morning of August 31, General Roberts led his division into Kandahar to the excitement of a badly demoralized garrison of just over 5,000 combat troops and 14 guns. The column halted outside the Shikarpur Gate to the south of the walled city before deploying for the operation later in the day. With his arrival in Kandahar, General Roberts assumed command of the troops in southern Afghanistan.

The Battle of Kandahar

Following an initial estimate of the situation, General Roberts decided to take up a position to the west of the city with its right on the cantonment (*chawni*) and on the left reaching old Kandahar. The disposition was intended to cover the city against possible attack by the Afghan army and get the force into striking distance of Ayub Khan's camp. Accordingly, at 10 AM, the infantry brigades moved out and occupied the Piquet Hill, Karez Hill, and the northeast ridge over old Kandahar while the cavalry deployed to the rear. Shots were exchanged as the artillery of the opposing sides came into occasional action. A thorough British reconnaissance operation was launched at 1:00 PM.

The reconnaissance disclosed that the Afghan positions were of considerable strength over a long and steep ridge stretching southwest from a mountain range that separates the Kandahar plain from the northwest extension of the Arghandab Valley. Due north of the city, a spur branches out from the main range, and it is intersected by two passes: the Babawali Kotal and the Kotal-i-Murcha. The latter connects the two sides of the ridge and was a mere mountain track, which could only be ascended single file, and part of which was so strewn with loose rocks that it was absolutely necessary to dismount and lead a horse along it.[88] Further southwest, the spur slopes down again, creating a saddle called the Babawali Kotal, which was passable by men and horses, and the British garrison had made a road over it that could handle artillery. The ridge finally ends on the plain after a steep descent of several hundred feet. The section of the ridge from the Babawali Kotal to its southwestern termination is known as the Pir-Paimal Hill, and a village of the same name stands at the foothill.

The Afghan defensive positions were established on the Babawali Kotal and within the corridor between the Pir Paimal ridge and the Chehel Zina Hill on the Qaitul Mount. The corridor included a green zone of orchards, enclosures, and clusters of villages stretching from Kandahar to the Arghandab Valley. Ayub Khan had set up his camp near the village of Mazra. It was behind the ridge, about a mile higher up in the valley, beyond the point where the road crossing over the Babawali Kotal joins with the bottom of the valley. The camp was strongly defended against a direct attack from Kandahar through the Babawali Kotal and contained a number of artillery positions. The camp, however, was vulnerable to a turning movement through the open corridor around the Pir Paimal Hill. In order to resist such a move, the surrounding heights were strongly held with artillery and riflemen to provide enfilading fire against a turning attack.

The correlation of forces was in favor of the British, with General Roberts's force at about 15,000, including over 5,000 troops of the Kandahar garrison in addition to his command of some 10,000 men. This force was faced by Ayub Khan's 4,000 regular infantry, 2,000 irregular cavalry, and an unknown number of *ghazis*.[89] Qualitatively, the situation was far more in favor of the British forces. Their regiments were better trained, better armed, and better disciplined than the Afghan regular and volunteer fighters. The British infantry regiments had significant superiority over Afghan foot soldiers since the British soldiers were armed with Martini-Henry and Snider breech-loading rifles, which far outranged the Afghans regiments' muzzle-loading rifles and the muskets of irregular Afghan troops. Only one-third of the ghazis had firearms.[90] In artillery strength, the two forces were nearly equal, each having 32 guns. In terms of small-arms firepower, the correlation of forces was at least 8 to 1 in favor of the British infantry. Another weakness of the Afghan force was the reported disloyalty of a segment of the Ayub's army. As Roberts wrote on August 27 in his cable to Simla, "The Kizilbashes [Qizil-Bash] and Kohistanis in his [Ayub's] army, about 1,200 Infantry and 300 Cavalry, offered to desert and join us directly [once] we made a show of attack."[91]

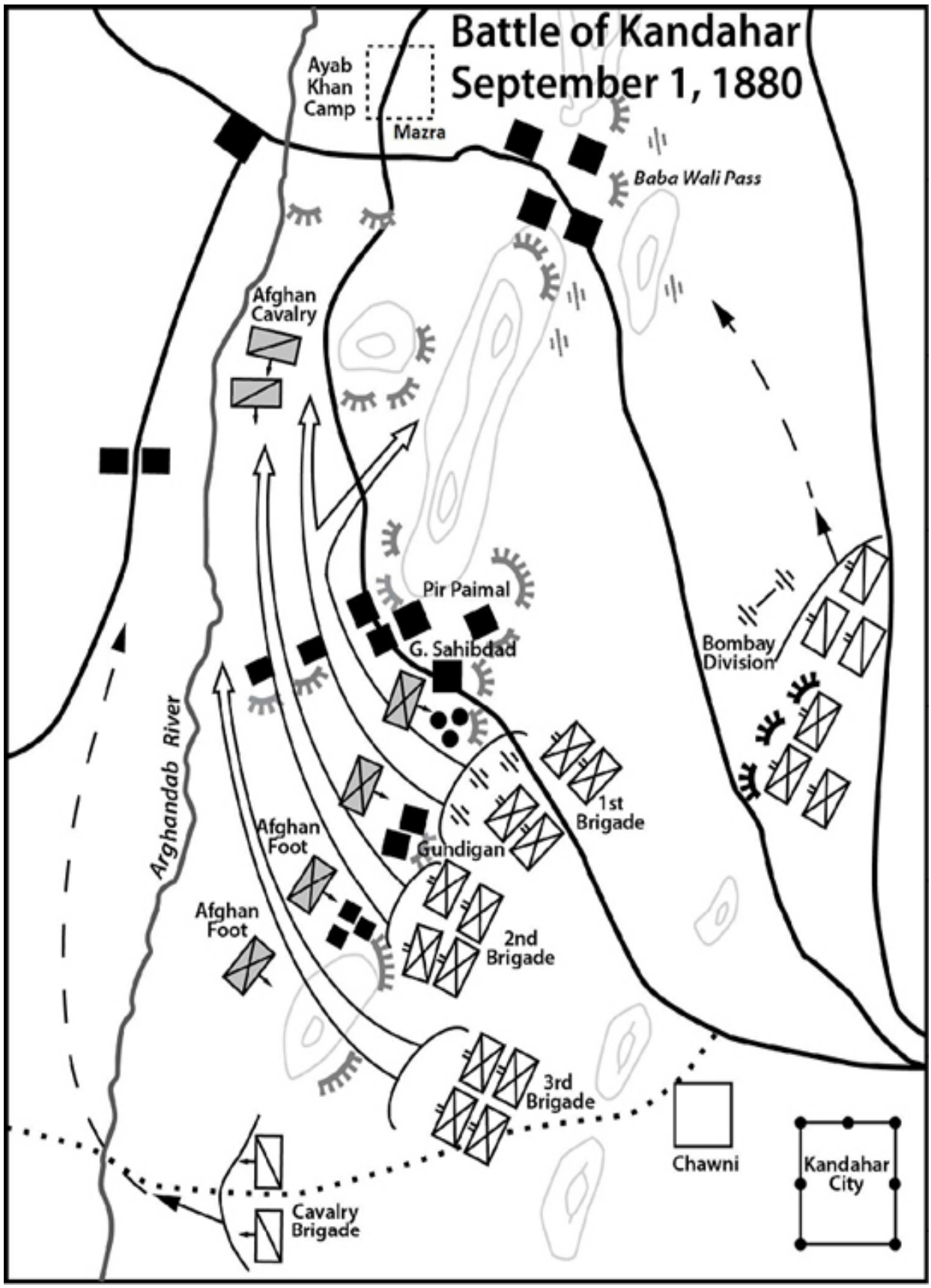
A survey of the situation convinced General Roberts that any attempt to carry the Babawali Kotal by direct attack could result in heavy losses and thus he determined to turn it. Accordingly, the plan of attack was to threaten the Afghan left at the Babawali Kotal with a feint, while the main attack would be directed against the Afghan right to turn the Babawali Kotal and advance up the Arghandab Valley and capture Ayub Khan's principal base at Mazra. The feint against the Afghan left was the mission of the cavalry brigade of the Kandahar garrison supported by its infantry and artillery. The artillery would pound the Afghan position

with heavy fire and keep the roads over the Murcha Kotal and the Babawali Pass in check, while part of the Kandahar force was reserved to protect the city. Two infantry brigades of the Kabul Force were to form the first line of the main attack on the Afghan right with one infantry brigade in reserve and the cavalry brigade drawn up in the rear left ready to intercept the Afghan line of retreat.

As signs of Ayub Khan's intended attack were apparent by August 31 and large numbers of Afghans were taking up position between the Gundi Mullah Sahibdad and Gundigan, General Roberts decided to launch the attack on the following morning to outmaneuver Sardar Ayub Khan.

The Bombay cavalry and infantry under General Primrose's command moved first and occupied their designated positions by 9:00 AM. The 40-pounder opened a vigorous cannonade on the Babawali Kotal, which was answered by the three Afghan field guns on the kotal. The kotal was swarming with an increasing number of *ghazis*. The planned feint made by these troops proved to work, as it attracted the Afghans' attention. Then General Roberts ordered General Ross to launch the main attack of the division with the 1st Infantry Brigade under Brigadier General Macpherson and the 2nd Infantry Brigade commanded by Brigadier General Baker and the 3rd Infantry Brigade under Brigadier General Macgregor in reserve. The attack by the main column would be conducted in two phases. In the first phase the leading brigades would break through the Afghan defenses on the Gundi Mullah Sahibdad-Gundigan line and advance to the Pir Paimal-Kharoti gap. The second phase would turn the extremity of the Pir Paimal Hill, take the Babawali Kotal in reverse, and press on up the Arghandab Valley and capture Ayub Khan's base at Mazra. The two leading brigades, each with four regiments and supported by 12 guns, advanced through the thickly vegetated area of orchards and enclosures and penetrated into the heavily held Afghan positions at the Gundi Mullah Sahibdad and the

enclosures to the west. They continued down to Gundigan after fierce fighting in close quarters where the *ghazis* fought to the last. During these heavy engagements the commander of the 72nd Highlanders of the 2nd Brigade, Lieutenant Colonel Brownlow, was killed along with many others. Under the thrust of eight infantry regiments and heavy artillery fire, the Afghan troops slowly withdrew to positions in their depth, allowing the two leading British brigades to emerge at the hill close to Pir Paimal. Wheeling to the right, the leading infantry brigades swept across the front through the thickly wooded enclosures on the western slopes of the Pir Paimal spur and took possession of Pir Paimal by noon.


Battle of Kandahar
September 1, 1880
Ayab Khan Camp
Mazra
Baba Wali Pass
Afghan Cavalry
Pir Paimal
G. Sahibdad
Bombay Division
Arghandab River
1st Brigade
Afghan Foot
Gundigan
Afghan Foot
2nd Brigade
3rd Brigade
Chawni
Kandahar City
Cavalry Brigade

The Battle of Kandahar, September 1, 1880.

With the completion of the first phase of the attack, General Roberts ordered the commitment of the 3rd Infantry Brigade, and the whole brigade column advanced around the Pir Paimal against another heavily held position on the other side of the Babawali Kotal. The Afghan guns on the kotal were turned around and engaged the British turning columns. The leading regiments of the 1st Brigade, supported by artillery, penetrated the Afghan entrenchments in a close-combat fight and then rushed into the Babawali Kotal, capturing the guns. Meanwhile, the 2nd Brigade advanced on its axis to the left and captured more Afghan guns. Anticipating that Ayub Khan's camp at Mazra would have to be taken by storm, the brigades halted to replenish ammunition. This caused a delay that offered an opportunity for the evacuation of the entire Afghan camp. The absence of cavalry with the infantry brigades proved to be a major tactical mistake, as a good opportunity was missed to pursue the retiring Afghan troops across the basin leading to Mazra. When the leading regiments resumed their advance, they proceeded a mile under sporadic Afghan fire before they came in sight of the Ayub Khan's camp, which was entirely deserted. With the capture of the camp at 1:00 PM, the battle was over, and the Afghan army was completely routed. Meanwhile, the cavalry brigade under Gough initially scouted westward down to Kokaran and then swung in a wider sweep across the Arghandab River toward Khakrez but failed to intercept the retreating Afghan regular regiments although they overtook some *ghazis* and volunteer militia.

British casualties during the day numbered 250, including 40 killed, and 18 more died of their wounds. The Afghan losses are unknown, but according to British sources, 600 Afghan bodies were found and buried by the British troops between Kandahar City and Pir Paimal. The whole British column returned to Kandahar after 9:00 PM the same day

except the 1st Infantry Brigade, which stayed overnight to protect the captured guns and stores. The British army fired over 62,000 rifle rounds during the actual combat. This equates to an average of 350 rounds per minute, one-sixth of what they shot during the Battle of Maiwand.

The Final Act

On September 8, a week after the Battle of Kandahar, the first elements of the Kabul-Kandahar Field Force left Kandahar for India, and the rest of the force followed soon. In Quetta, on October 15, 1880, General Roberts handed over his command to Major General Phayre of the Baluchistan Force. Kandahar was reincorporated into Afghanistan after the British Cabinet decided to withdraw from Kandahar and offered the province to Amir Abdur Rahman. Being helped financially and materially by the British, the amir took possession of the city as his appointed governor, Sardar Hashim Khan, arrived in the city on April 16, 1881. A week later, the British garrison handed Kandahar over to the governor and marched off to Quetta. Thus ended the second Anglo-Afghan war.

After the departure of the British forces, Sardar Ayub Khan made another attempt to seize control of the city and marched from Herat. He defeated Amir Abdur Rahman’s troops on July 20, 1881, near Maiwand and captured Kandahar. Amir Abdur Rahman was forced to rush personally to face his royal cousin. The opposing armies met under the walls of Kandahar on September 22 of the same year. Ayub Khan lost the battle and fled toward Herat, where he found that the city was occupied by another force allied with the amir. Ayub Khan fled to Persia and in 1888 took asylum in British India.

The Outcome

The Battle of Kandahar capped a yearlong series of major battles that had been fought since September 1879 during the second phase of the second Anglo-Afghan war. Of the nine main tactical combats during this period, three were won by the Afghans and six by the British forces. The war demonstrated the unprecedented effect of the breech-loading rifle, which dominated the tactical battlefield. Operationally, the British command managed to retain control over the territories it occupied during the war. Strategically, British India expanded its military influence, realizing a defendable frontier with Afghanistan, and politically it gained control of the Afghanistan government's external relations.

But generally, the second Anglo-Afghan war was as disastrous to British India as its first war in Afghanistan. In practical terms, the Pishin and Sibi Valleys were the only tangible results of the war that remained in British hands since the Liberal Government, which acceded to power in Britain at the end of the war, decided that both the Khyber Pass and the Kurram Valley, which were acquired during the war, should be abandoned. In the words of Forbes, "Lord Beaconsfield's vaunted 'scientific frontier,' condemned by a consensus of the best military opinions, was rejected by the Liberal Government."[92] However, as a result of the war "the basis of India's defense has been shifted from the line of Indus to the western slope of the Suleiman Mountain range and from Peshawar to Quetta. This is the net result of the war, and is not to be regarded lightly."[93]

In the winter of 1881 the British troops evacuated the Khyber and the Kurram Valley and placed them in the charge of tribal levies paid by the Indian government. Thus the de facto status of the northwestern frontier returned to the prewar status. Meanwhile, Lord Lytton's plan to fragment Afghanistan by separating Kandahar from the rest of

Afghanistan was shattered as a result of the British defeat at Maiwand in July 1880.

The costs of war for the British government were high, reaching about 20 million pounds sterling and causing the disbandment of a number of Indian Army regiments as an economy measure. The war also caused heavy losses in lives and material. The army suffered an estimated 50,000 casualties, including killed and wounded, and a significant depletion of highly trained officers. Colonel Hanna put the number of killed up to 40,000, which must have included a lot of camp followers. The war devastated the transport herd of India in the northwest due to the loss of a staggering number of transport animals. Just the number of dead camels reached 90,000.

In an interesting argument, General Fredrick Roberts wrote,

> We have nothing to fear from Afghanistan, and the best thing to do is to leave it as much as possible to itself. It may not be very flattering to our amour proper, but I feel sure I am right when I say that the less the Afghans see of us the less they will dislike us. Should Russia in future years attempt to conquer Afghanistan, or invade India through it, we should have a better chance of attaching the Afghans to our interest if we avoid all interference with them in the meantime.[94]

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7 A Period of Uneasy Peace and the Third Anglo-Afghan War

1880–1919

The end of the British occupation of Afghanistan was followed by a period of nearly 40 years of uneasy peace, during which the country emerged as a unified modern state within internationally recognized borders. The last decades of the nineteenth century found Afghanistan grappling with two major challenges that influenced its domestic and external politics: building a unified state under a strong central government; and maintaining a balance between its competing imperial neighbors—British India and imperial Russia. The delineation of the country's borders figured prominently in its external affairs. The second half of this period, which began at the turn of the century, saw the country occupied with the rise of nationalism and a constitutional movement at home while embracing a wave of anticolonialism spreading over the region and invigorating the Afghans' struggle for full independence.

After mounting the throne in Kabul in August 1880, Amir Abdur Rahman Khan faced some of the same challenges other postoccupation Afghan rulers confronted during the country's recent past. The British occupiers left Afghanistan

politically divided, militarily atomized, and economically broke. There were elements who had sided with the British and others who had fought them. There were tribal, religious, and political figures that emerged as influential leaders during the war who were competing for power and influence with those who invoked dynastic pedigrees to claim legitimacy. The amir faced the enormous challenges of pacifying the tribes, reunifying the country, strengthening internal security, and subduing semi-independent chieftains.

The two options to unify the country were either the traditional way of accommodating all the centers of emerging powers into an all-inclusive polity or using an integrating approach to reduce every local power network through the establishment of a strong, authoritative central government. The postwar ruler Amir Abdur Rahman saw the former option exacerbated by the competing demands of local domains of authority, which was detrimental to the authoritative style of the amir. The latter option required enormous resources and a forceful pacification drive. Having been toughened by two decades of social and political upheaval, and fueled by civil wars and foreign occupation, the amir looked for a solution with the breaking-and-making approach. He saw that the key to stabilization was curbing the internal dissensions and transforming the war-generated power structures into a strong central authority. The process invoked his ruthless crackdown on his enemies and assertive warlords to break up their power while asserting his own authority with the help of a strong military autocracy. Sustaining the absolute authority of the center and withstanding residual domestic challenges necessitated the creation of a powerful army. So the breaking and making proceeded hand in hand.

Pacification and Integration

It took Abdur Rahman 12 years to defeat numerous rebellions across the country and establish his control. He was often harsh in his methods and merciless toward his enemies. This earned him the epithet of the “Iron Amir.” In his memoirs, he strongly defends his heavy-handedness as the only way to pacify the rebellious tribes and mullahs and bring a lawless country under control. “Every priest, mullah, and chief of every tribe and village considered himself an independent king,” he wrote, “and for about 200 years past the freedom and independence of many of these priests was never broken by their sovereigns. The *Mirs* of Turkestan, the *Mirs* of Hazara, the chiefs of Ghilzai were all stronger than their Amirs, and, so long as they were the rulers, the King could not do justice in the country.”[1] He did not spare even those national leaders who had led popular resistance against the British invasion when these same leaders opposed him. Among them General Mohammad Jan Khan Wardak was accused of antigovernment conspiracy and was exiled to Mazar-i-Sharif, where he was mysteriously murdered. Further, the amir jailed many leading veterans of the anti-British war and forced others to migrate. His attempts to reconcile the nonagenarian Mullah Mushk-i-Alam, the spirit of the Afghan resistance, failed as the mullah defied the amir’s systematic crackdown on national leaders until his death in Ghazni in late 1886, leaving his son to lead the Ghilzai rebellion against the amir.

During the first 12 years of his reign, the amir fought four major battles and many smaller uprisings. In 1881, as noted in the previous chapter, his first major encounter was with Sardar Ayub Khan in Kandahar. He defeated the sardar, seized control of the seat of his government in Herat, and drove the sardar into Persia. But this did not guarantee his unchallenged rule. The amir had to defeat three more major rebellions and many other smaller ones in order to make himself the “master or sovereign of the country.” The three other major battles included the Ghilzai uprising (1886–

1887), Sardar Ishaq Khan's rebellion (1888), and the Hazara revolt (1888–1891).

The second major rebellion erupted in 1886 when the Ghilzai tribes, located between Ghazni and Qalat, raised the banner of revolt against the tyranny of the amir. Veterans of the second Anglo-Afghan war called the amir *kafir* (infidel) and a British lackey for allegedly cracking down on the *ghazis*. Inspired by the war hero Mullah Mushk-i-Alam, the tribes waged an expanding rebellion that lasted about two years and stimulated uprisings as far away as Maimana in the north and Herat in the west. Abdur Rahman claims that the rebellion was fueled by the enforcement of tax collections and cutting the subsidies and privileges of the mullahs and other influential figures, plus the imprisonment of some recalcitrant Ghilzai chiefs. He wrote,

> The well-known mullah, Mushk-i-Alam (the musk of the universe)—I called him Mush-i-Alam (the mouse of the universe), a more appropriate name for him than the first . . . joined with the so-called *ghazis* who used to extort money from the people. They called themselves *ghazis* and mullahs in order to appear like great men and people of importance in the eyes of the subjects. As I had stopped all this nonsense, they tried to give me trouble by using the great influence they exercised over the ignorant, uncivilized people of the Ghilzai nation, to which they themselves belonged. They continued their intrigues for years, and succeeded in kindling a fire from which sprang a civil war which caused great bloodshed and misery to thousands of people.[2]

The Ghilzai rebellion began in the fall of 1886, led by Sher Jan Taraki (the leader of the *ghazis* in the Battle of Ahmad Khel in April 1880) and inspired by Mullah Mushk-i-Alam. The rebels of the Andar and Hotak subtribes cut the Kandahar-Kabul road and raided government columns and convoys between Ghazni and Mushaki. Although a government army of four cavalry and two infantry regiments and two artillery batteries, led by Ghulam Haidar Khan Tokhi (Landay, "Shorty"), defeated and dispersed the rebels, the Ghilzais renewed their revolt in the spring of 1887 and mobilized their tribal *lashkar*s across the Ghilzai country from Ghazni to Qalat. In Ghazni, Mullah Abdul Karim, son of Mullah Mushk-i-

Alam, gathered a 12,000-strong tribal army and called on other tribesman to join the war against the repressive government.

The fallout of the initial government setback spread to other parts of the country. The Ghilzais requested help from the people in Maimana and Herat and called on Sardar Ayub Khan to join his *ghazi* compatriots. Soon rumors spread that Herat was in the hands of the rebels, encouraging the people of Maimana to rise. Sardar Ayub Khan left Tehran to join the revolt. The Iron Amir did not waver. After his army, under Ghulam Haidar Khan (Landay), defeated a large gathering of the Hotak tribe at Attaghar in Zabul and the Tarakis near Ab-i-Estadah Lake in Muqur, he moved north to deal with the Andars under Mullah Abdul Karim in Ghazni. In June, assisted by reinforcement from Kabul the general fought the rebels through July and broke the main body of the rebels in August 1888, forcing their leader, Mullah Karim, to escape to Kurram. The captured leaders, including Karim's brother and a former general, Timur Shah Ghilzai, were executed by the amir. Some were stoned to death. Meanwhile a web of the amir's spies was watching Sardar Ayub Khan's possible return to join the Ghilzai rebellion. When the sardar reached Ghurian and sensed the danger, he retraced his steps to Mashhad and left the Afghan political scene forever.

The third major rebellion that challenged Amir Abdur Rahman's authority was led by his own cousin, Sardar Ishaq Khan, son of Amir Azam Khan, a longtime companion of the amir during his years of wandering and exile. The amir had appointed his cousin the governor of Afghan Turkistan in 1881, where he wielded power and proclaimed himself amir and began coining money. Abdur Rahman immediately dispatched General Ghulam Haidar Khan and several other officers at the head of a large army of four cavalry and 13 infantry regiments and 26 guns to Bamian to deal with his rebellious cousin. Meanwhile, he ordered Sardar Abdullah Khan Tokhi, the governor of Qataghan and Badakhshan, to

move against the rebels from the east. On September 29, 1888, the combined force met Sardar Ishaq Khans's army of over 20,000 men in the Ghaznigak Valley, three miles south of Tashqurghan. In a bizarre turn of events, some units of the Kabul army that had defected to the enemy were galloping toward the hill where Sardar Ishaq Khan was seated in order to submit to him. But suspecting the men were sent to take him prisoner, the sardar ran away and left the battlefield, where his army was still fighting. The news of the flight of the sardar disheartened his troops and they were decisively defeated by the Kabul army.[3]

The fourth major rebellion was staged by the Hazaras in the central mountainous tracts of Afghanistan. This proved to be the fiercest revolt with the most devastating and brutal consequences for the Hazara population. The amir believed that his victory over the rebels contributed to the consolidation of his power as well as peace and security in the state more than crushing any other of the major revolts. The amir claimed that the Hazaras had raided and plundered the neighboring areas for "about 300 years past, and none of the kings had had the power to make them absolutely peaceful. They considered themselves rather too strong to be defeated, and were very proud of their power." He wrote that despite his call on the Hazaras to stop disturbing travelers on the roads, the Hazara tribe of Sheikh Ali harassed his own column in 1888 when he was passing through Bamian on his way to restore peace in Turkistan. Other contemporary sources confirm that the amir did try reconciliation of the Hazara people through diplomatic efforts.[4] But the rebellion was initially triggered by a refusal to pay the heavy government-imposed taxes, which was exploited by the local Hazara chieftains who were interested to maintain their long-standing power in the face of government penetration into the Hazara country. Reaction to the amir's authority was not the same throughout the Hazara country. For example, the Hazaras' chiefs (mirs) of Ghazni,

Jaghori, Behsud, Malistan, and Dai-Zangi all declared allegiance to the amir.[5] Later on, when the amir took military action to pacify the area, the extensive abusive behavior and violence of government officials and soldiers turned even supporters of the amir against him, resulting in far wider rebellion.[6]

Between 1890 and 1892, the amir used force four times to break the Hazaras' uprising. In 1890, he sent a detachment to punish the Sheikh Ali Hazaras. The detachment crushed the insurgents, killing some and forcing others to surrender. The second time, in the spring of 1891, the amir sent a larger force on three axes into the Hazara territory after the Hazaras renewed their raids and defied the government authorities. In this operation, Sardar Abdul Qudus Khan, the governor of Bamian, led a column from Bamian while General Sher Mohammad Khan, a veteran of the Ahmad Khel battle, joined the action from Kabul and Brigadier Zabardast Khan moved with another column from Herat. The convergence of these forces on the area forced the Hazaras (after heavy fighting on difficult terrain) to surrender, and their stronghold at Urozgan was occupied by the government troops. About 100 Hazara chiefs were sent as prisoners to Kabul, where the amir treated them well in order to reconcile these turbulent people. The amir sent them back to their homes and appointed one of their chiefs, Mohammad Azim Khan, the viceroy of the Hazaras and honored him with the title of sardar.

In the spring of 1892, the "viceroy" Azim Khan, in collaboration with Qazi Asghar, the Hazaras' spiritual leader, instigated the tribes to rise in revolt throughout their territory. They blocked all the passes and access roads to the area from Kabul to Kandahar and other parts of the country. The amir ordered General Mir Atta Khan, with a strong army of 8,000 men, to march against the tribes from Ghazni and instructed Mohammad Hussein, a Hazara ally and a rival of the rebel leader Azim Khan, to move against the rebels from

the south. The combined action by the government columns defeated Azim Khan, who was brought to Kabul, where he died in prison. The amir rewarded Mohammad Hussein for his service and appointed him the governor of the Hazarajat.

The new governor, however, soon turned against the amir and instigated and led the widest Hazara revolt. This revolt had the most brutal and devastating consequences for the Hazaras and lasting social and political impact. Once he took over the government of the Hazarajat, Mohammad Hussein mobilized his tribes across the area and called on the Hazaras elsewhere in the country to join the universal Hazara insurrection. His call was answered by all ethnic Hazaras wherever they lived and served, even in Kabul and other places outside Hazarajat. The rebels attacked and plundered government installations and arsenals. The revolt came at a time when the amir was faced with other pressing political and security challenges elsewhere, such as in Maimana, Jalalabad, and Bajaur. “I was obliged,” wrote the amir, “to take all possible means to stop this general rebellion and anxiety.” He ordered his commander in chief, General Ghulam Haidar Khan Charkhi, to march from Afghan Turkestan with all available force against the Hazaras from the northwest and instructed another force from Herat, under the Qazi Sayed-u-Din, the governor of Herat, to advance from the west. Meanwhile, he dispatched Sardar Abdullah Khan from Kandahar and Brigadier Amir from Kabul to march from the southeast. These columns converged on the area and attacked the rebels from all main directions. At the same time, the amir called on volunteers to help in the punishment of the rebels and gave them a free hand in looting and enslaving the recalcitrant tribes. Some 40,000 fighting men under their tribal chiefs entered the Hazara country from all directions. The rebel leader, Mohammad Hussein Khan, along with many other chiefs and mirs of the Hazaras, was brought to Kabul and severely punished. What followed was the carnage of mass killing and pillage, as well

as the rape and enslavement of Hazara women, who were bought and sold into slavery. In many cases the Hazara lands and pastures were seized by the resettled Pashtun tribes, forcing the local Hazaras to migrate to Khorasan, Sistan, and Baluchistan. Further, local governors appointed by Kabul were given a free hand in dealing with the Hazaras, who spared little effort in exploiting the wretched defeated people.[7]

External Affairs

Amir Abdur Rahman's top foreign policy issue was defining the borders of the Afghan state with its neighbors. In an agreement reached between Russia and Britain in 1873, the northern boundary of Afghanistan was recognized as the Oxus River down to its major bend northward (Khamiab) and a mutually accepted line to the west of the bend, which was not precisely determined. The Russian occupation of Merv in 1883 alarmed the amir and intensified his diplomatic efforts with the British to define the border exactly. With the occupation of Merv, Russia claimed all of the former ruler's territory, including the oasis of Panjdeh on the Murghab River, where an Afghan battalion under General Ghaus-u-din Khan was stationed. Accordingly, Russian troops advanced to Pul-i-Khatun on the Harirud River and to Pul-i-Khishti on the Murghab River—the two rivers flowing north out of Afghanistan. Although Russia and Britain agreed, in May 1874, to appoint a joint commission to define the border, continued Russian incursions to the south caused long delays in the work of the commission.

On March 30, 1885, a large Russian column attacked the Afghan battalion of some 500 troops at Panjdeh. The Afghan garrison put up a gallant defense, but it was overwhelmed by the enemy forces, losing 200 to 300 of its troops before the Russians captured Panjdeh. The incident took place at a time

when the amir was meeting with the British viceroy at Rawalpindi. The seizure of Panjdeh brought the great powers to the brink of war. The amir lacked the capacity to respond effectively to the Russian incursion, but he could invoke the British agreement of 1880, which pledged to support the amir against foreign invasion. Although a large British force assembled in Quetta for a possible response, neither the amir nor the British Government was keen on countering the Russian move with military means, fearing increased instability. The amir left for home with an assistance package of one million rupees, 38 guns of various calibers, 10,000 Martini rifles, 15,000 Snider rifles, 5,000 Enfield rifles, and nine million rounds of ammunition. Then between 1885 and 1888, a joint Anglo-Russian commission, without any Afghan representation, agreed that the Russians would relinquish the farthest territory captured in their advance, but retain Panjdeh. The agreement delineated a permanent northern Afghan frontier that is marked by the Amu Darya to its northward bend at Khamiab and then along the so-called Ridgway line to the Zulfiqar Pass. In 1891, the border between Afghanistan and Persia was demarcated. The border with China at Pamir was defined, which was created by the establishment of a buffer (the Wakhan Corridor) between the Russian and British Asian possessions in 1895.

But the frontier between Afghanistan and British India remained the most controversial issue, even after it was established by a bilateral agreement. The need to identify the boundary between the two governments was raised by Amir Abdur Rahman, who asked the British authorities in Simla to clarify the extent of British claims on the Afghan eastern tribal frontier. This arose from the many uncertainties that clouded the issue since the Treaty of Gandamak in 1878 and the final settlement of the second Anglo-Afghan war. Accordingly, the British government communicated to the amir the approximate sphere of British control, which included Chitral, Swat, Dir and Asmar, Bajaur,

Kurram, Waziristan, Zhobe, Chaman, and Chagai. The amir tried to convince the British authorities that keeping a large part of his fellow Pashtun tribes out of Kabul's control would be detrimental to the security of India, arguing that his control of the tribes would allow him to mobilize them when needed for *Jihad* against the powers that may threaten the British Empire from the west (Russia). Otherwise, he opined, the British would constantly have to use force to pacify the unruly tribes and may lose control over them when the threat of force is removed.[8]

In order to finalize the demarcation of the boundary, a British mission headed by Sir Mortimer Durand, foreign secretary of India, traveled to Kabul to negotiate the boundary with the amir government. After some minor adjustments that left Asmar and part of the Mohmand, Shinwar, and Wazir tribal areas under Kabul control, the 1,640-mile long frontier, known as the Durand Line, was established on the basis of an agreement in 1893 between Amir Abdur Rahman Khan and Sir Mortimer Durand, representing British India. The demarcation of the frontier was aimed at fixing the limit of their respective spheres of influence. The single-page agreement of seven short articles established a line that cut through the Pashtun tribal areas and stretched south through Baluchistan, splitting both the Pashtuns and the Baluch that lived on both sides of the line. As the British author Fraser-Tytler notes, "The British in refusing to obey the law of political and strategic development by a physical occupation of the natural frontiers of India had to take the consequences of such refusal. They solved the major problem, but in such a way that they set up for themselves a minor problem which has defied solution ever since." He argued that the line "is illogical from the point of view of ethnography, of strategy and of geography. It cuts across one of the main basins of the Indus watershed, it splits a nation in two, and it even divides tribes."[9]

After the departure of the British and the emergence of Pakistan in the former northwestern possessions of the British in India, the Durand Line constituted the de facto border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, the Durand agreement was signed by Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, whose foreign affairs were under British control, and the line was merely a tribal frontier limiting the spheres' influence of each side without describing it as the boundary of India.[10] Consequently, no Afghan government thus far has recognized the line as a legal border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Indeed, in 1947, shortly before the independence and partition of British India, Afghanistan formally abrogated the treaty.

Fearing Russian intentions to infiltrate into the non-Muslim mountainous tract of Kafiristan, which was wrongly considered in some circles in the West to be Christian, Amir Abdur Rahman decided to annex the country of warlike tribes before it was occupied by outside forces. He realized that fighting in the mountain remoteness of Kafiristan in summer would be hard and decided to attack the region in the winter when the Kafirs were confined to their valleys and unable to shift troops around. The amir concentrated several columns around Kafiristan in the autumn of 1895 and launched a multipronged invasion of the area in the winter. This included a column under Mohammad Ali Khan moving from Panjsher against the fortress of Cullum, a force commanded by General Ghulam Haidar Charkhi advancing from Asmar, a third column under General Kattan Khan marching south from Badakhshan, and a fourth one headed by the governor of Laghman Faiz Mohammad Charkhi marching northeast from Laghman. The simultaneous invasion of the area by several columns conquered Kafiristan in a short time, and the amir moved and resettled many inhabitants of the valleys in Laghman while the country was occupied by retired soldiers and other Afghans.[11] The Kafirs were forcefully converted to Islam and their country was renamed

“Nuristan” (the land of light). The amir recruited a large number of the brave tribal youths into the army to form the *Jadidi* regiments.

Rebuilding of the Army

Abdur Rahman’s main instrument in establishing central control was the creation of a loyal and powerful army subsidized by the British. Although Amir Sher Ali Khan had modernized the state military establishment and built a large and credible army, his military forces had disintegrated during the war of 1878–1880, and the new amir had to re-create the army from scratch. Building on Amir Sher Ali’s military reform, Abdur Rahman gradually improved the system, shaping it into his own strategic and administrative requirements. Instead of a traditional reliance on military contingents provided by tribal chiefs or the feudal levy system, the amir tried to create an army totally linked to the state.[12] In terms of the wide range of conceptual and organizational initiatives and structural improvements, Amir Abdur Rahman is considered the actual founder of the modern army of Afghanistan. However, the enormity of the task far outstripped the government’s military resources. The amir was forced to rely on a tribal militia that numbered up to 40,000 during the pacification of Hazarajat (1891–1893).[13] Recognizing the many deficiencies in the military system, he increased its potential significance by substituting for it one central army, paid, created, and controlled directly by him for the old feudal levies.

In 1895, the government introduced a partial draft system called *hasht nafari*, whereby one man in eight was called to serve in the army. The recruitment quota was imposed on the population of a district or a tribal area. Under this system, the recruits, selected by drawing names (*peshk*), had the option of paying for an exemption or they could

choose to pay for a substitute (*ewaz*). The *hasht nafari* underwent several modifications after the turn of the twentieth century, where all adult men (age 14–50), except government employees, were to serve in the army for three years.[14] It was replaced by a universal draft system in 1941. The draft was an extremely unpopular system and was never fully implemented. Many people even migrated to neighboring countries to escape the harsh enforcement of *hasht nafari*.[15] In such a sociopolitical environment, the state armies were faced with two major challenges: creating a national loyalty among the soldiers that would surpass their tribal allegiances and providing the military units with the skills to fight effectively in both counterinsurgencies and conventional wars. The response to both challenges was slow and unsteady.

The logistic system and operational sustainability of the army were improved through the creation of a transportation park of 50,000 pack animals and the establishment of large reserve stores of grain at major garrisons, including Kabul, Kandahar, Balkh, and Herat. The monthly pay scales were set up so that generals of the first class received 600 Kabuli rupees, a brigadier 250, a colonel of cavalry 200, a major 120, captains of cavalry 80, captains of infantry and artillery 30, down to corporals of foot, who received 10 rupees. The rank and file were paid partly in kind, a trooper getting 16 rupees in cash and four rupees' worth of grain, a private of foot five rupees in cash and three rupees' worth of grain.[16] A regiment had its organic imam and a physician (*Hakim*) and a surgeon (*Jarrah*). A signal corps and a body of sappers and miners (locally called *Saffaemain*) capable of bridge-building and road construction were also created. The artillery was modernized and trained in target acquisition and gunnery, and the infantry were put through courses of musketry, and the officers were trained in the fundamentals of tactics and strategy.

The amir had an ambitious idea of building a one-million-man army comprising regular troops and tribal levies with a peacetime force of 300,000.[17] To support such an enormous force, he set up a military hardware manufacturing plant in Kabul supported by English engineers.[18] He might have been able to procure weapons for a large army, but their professional capacity would be problematic. At his death, the peacetime strength of the regular army was estimated at 150,000 deployed across the country and on the Russian, Persian, and Indian borders. It included 80 infantry regiments (700 each), 40 cavalry regiments (400 each), and 100 artillery batteries. This numbered 56,000 foot and 16,000 horse. Additionally, the Royal Guard included four infantry regiments (1,000 each) and three cavalry regiments (800 each). The regular police numbered 30,000 while tribal levies consisted of 20,000 foot and 10,000 mounted soldiers.[19]

The regular army organization was refined by the turn of the century. Four regiments of the cavalry corps in Kabul were organized as the *Shahi Resala*, or House Guard, which was better armed, uniformed, and paid than the others. The artillery comprised 50 batteries of six guns each. Additionally, some 200 stationary guns were mounted in various cantonments and forts, most of which were obsolete smoothbore muzzle-loaders. About 60 mobile machineguns were organized in units of six weapons. The infantry corps numbered 60,000 men and consisted of about 90 battalions generally made up of six or more companies of 100 men each. The Guard comprised three battalions, one made up of 10 and the other two of six companies each. They were named the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd *Ardal Paltan* (orderly battalion). Additionally, there were three other Guard battalions called *Ardalian* whose duties were not limited to protecting the amir. Another battalion named the *Ardalian-i-Khas*, or Household Guard, was tasked to protect the harem.[20]

Both cavalry and infantry regiments were recruited on a territorial basis with most battalions comprising men of the same tribe and identified by their tribal and local affiliation, such as the Kandahari, Zadran, Jaji, Herati, Turk (Uzbek), and Kohistani battalions. There were units known by the name of their current or former commanders such as Paltan-i-Zabardast (the Battalion of Zabardast), Paltan-i-Mian Rahim, and the like. The sappers and miners regiment and the artillery entirely comprised Hazaras. Except these, all the men in the army were Pashtuns.[21] The city police, known as *Kotwali*, were recruited from mixed races and different areas.

In order to arm and equip his growing army, the amir built a military industrial infrastructure with the help of foreign engineers and experts. The weekly output of its ordnance factories was two artillery pieces and 175 rifles and an assortment of ammunition. The artillery park included both English-made and locally manufactured field pieces and guns of different calibers with sufficient ammunition. They included a wide range of models, from Krupp field-pieces to Maxim, to Norden-Feldt and Hotchkiss quick-firers.[22] The infantry troops were armed with different types of breech-loading and muzzle-loading rifles ranging from the old two-grooved Brunswick to the Martini-Henry. The tribal forces were largely armed with matchlocks.

Maintaining such a large centralized military establishment required an enormous amount of resources and attention. It took a strong and proactive ruler like Amir Abdur Rahman to hold it together and keep it running. In order to promote the esprit de corps, the men of the different tribes were usually incorporated regimentally under their own tribal leaders. Every cantonment was provided with a garrison mullah who, on Fridays, led the prayers and read the *Khutba* before the assembled troops.

The size of the irregular Afghan horse was flexible. They were not particularly numerous, although Kandahar and its

dependencies could furnish 8,000, Ghazni 5000, and Kabul (including Jalalabad, Logar, and the Kohdaman) 15,000, while Balkh, with its Uzbek population, could field 10,000: “Mounted upon small but wiry horses, carrying a perfect arsenal of weapons, among which shield, spear, matchlock, sword, pistol and knife were prominent.”[23]

The Development of Afghan Nationalism

Amir Abdur Rahman died on October 1, 1901, and was succeeded by his eldest son, Habibullah (1872–1919). Amir Habibullah was a reform-minded ruler who opened Afghan society to some extent and took steps to modernize his country. He brought Western medicine and modern technology to Afghanistan and founded Habibia High School in 1903 as well as the Harbia military academy. Further, he instituted various legal reforms and repealed many of the harshest criminal penalties. Other reforms included the dismantling of the repressive internal intelligence organization that had been put in place by his father.

Amir Habibullah’s reign coincided with the rise of nationalism and the constitutional movement at home and the spread of a wave of anticolonialism and pan-Islamism in the region[24] that invigorated the Afghans’ struggle for gaining constitutional changes. The first constitutional movement led by Afghan political activists, under the guidance of progressive teachers, including Indian Muslims, demanded a constitutional monarchy and a freely elected national assembly. The reformers also sought full independence from foreign domination, social justice, and the introduction of modernization.[25] In spite of the amir’s initial consent, the first constitutional movement in Afghanistan (1905–1909) did not last long. When some radical elements of the movement showed interest in violence, the amir brutally crushed it, executing eight and

jailing 35 leading members of the movement. This, however, did not stop the national demands for change. The movement regained momentum during the First World War (1914–1918) when Afghanistan got caught up in the great powers' politics, opening a new phase of constitutional revival that reached fruition following the assassination of Amir Habibullah in 1919 and the ascendance of his progressive son Amanullah to the throne.

Impressed by the Japanese defeat of Russia in 1905, Habibullah increasingly manifested his desire to the British Government to be treated as an independent ruler. These protestations notwithstanding, the amir did sign a treaty with British India on March 21, 1905, in which he continued to defer the conduct of Afghanistan's foreign policy to the British. The treaty provided for the British payment of an annual subsidy of 1.8 million rupees to the amir, along with the right to import arms from India. The same year, the amir's agents purchased 10,000 Lee Enfield 303 rifles at a price of three pound Sterling apiece, excluding transportation costs.[26]

Power relations were changing in Europe. Germany was becoming more dominant. The tsar's authority in Russia was in decline due to its defeat in the Far East by Japan and the bloody, unsuccessful 1905 revolution within the Russian Empire, including Central Asia. The Great Game in Central Asia was overtaken by these events, and the two competing actors, Russia and Britain, decided to end their century-long differences in Asia. This resulted in the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 in St. Petersburg, which defined their spheres of influence in Persia, confirmed Britain's influence in Afghanistan, and pledged mutual noninterference in Tibet. By this convention, Britain agreed not to occupy any parts of Afghanistan as long as the amir observed the 1905 treaty and Russia pledged to continue dealing with Afghanistan solely through the British government.

Responding to the waves of nationalism at home, Amir Habibullah refused to recognize the convention on the grounds that he was not consulted. The amir, however, knew very well that he was in no position to act against it. His dissenting voice catered only to the demands of domestic nationalistic politics. In spite of the growing calls for independence by the elite, the amir continued to coexist with the British during the First World War. Because of his policy of neutrality during the war, despite the strong anti-British constituency in his country and in his own court, the amir firmly believed that his policy would be rewarded after the war. He fully believed that the war would be won by the Entente Powers[27] against the Center block.[28] The amir believed that his neutrality and tacit support would win British recognition of the independence of Afghanistan. In August 1914, upon the outbreak of World War I, the amir announced Afghanistan's neutrality. However, in October 1914, with the entry of Turkey into the war on Germany's side, the amir came under strong domestic pressure to take a stand against the British.

During the war, the sultan of Turkey, considered the spiritual leader of the Muslims, fought alongside Germany and called on all believers to unite in waging a holy war against the Entente Powers. In September 1915, the arrival in Kabul of a Turko-German mission led by Turkish General Kazim Bey and German Captain Oskar von Niedermayer created strong pressure on the amir from his anti-British and pro-Muslim constituencies. The constituencies wanted the amir to receive and accommodate the mission. The amir concurred, but he notified the British government in a message, saying, "I am not a double dealer. I mean to stand by the British if I can, but do not judge me by individual acts."[29] His "individual acts" were mostly influenced by a number of political groups led and supported by influential figures at the court and elsewhere. These included a moderate pro-Turkish party led by the amir's son and heir

apparent, Inayatullah Khan; an anti-British conservative clerical group headed by the amir's brother, Sardar Nasrullah Khan; and a modernist-nationalist party with Turkish leanings led by Mahmud Tarzi, who owned the Kabul's only newspaper, *Seraj-ul-Akhbar*, which promoted an anticolonialist and pan-Islamist message. Tarzi was related to the royal family and, as the father-in-law of the amir's younger son Amanullah, had a strong influence over the young prince. The Turko-German mission also included 12 other Germans and a group of Indian revolutionaries such as Mahindra Pratap and a fundamentalist Muslim leader, Obaidullah Sindhi, who sought Afghan support in instigating a revolution in India by large numbers of the aggrieved subjects of the British Raj. The Turko-German mission was instigating unrest among the frontier tribes, tying down the army of India in India, and thus preventing it from fighting in the Mediterranean basin, Arabia, or the trenches of France.

Faced with the dilemma of accommodating the growing Muslim feeling for the anti-British *Jihad* declared by the Ottoman caliph and fearing the British reprisal, the amir called a *Jirga* of mullahs and tribal chiefs for consultation. As in most other cases, he was able to manipulate the assembly to stave off a reversal of his decision while he argued in favor of neutrality. Meanwhile, the amir wanted to use the German connection as leverage in his relations with the British while not risking British hostility. Accordingly, at the end of December 1915, the amir made an offer to the Turko-German mission that he knew it would refuse. He stated that he was prepared to enter into a treaty to declare war on India only if Germany would guarantee Afghanistan's territorial integrity, make a payment of 20 million pounds in gold, supply 100,000 rifles and 300 modern artillery pieces and ammunition, and deploy 20,000 German and Turkish troops to Baluchistan to attack the British. The Turko-German mission stayed in Kabul until May 1916 without getting the amir's firm support of the German project. Later, with the

collapse of Persia and its effective partitioning between Britain and Russia in 1916, the whole project was overtaken by events. But the Indian agitators remained in Kabul, contacting revolutionary elements within India for an anti-British uprising.

Amir Habibullah's policy to keep Afghanistan out of the war and resist attempts to get him into a Turko-German–instigated anti-British action proved to be of immense help to the British Raj. The amir highly expected that such service would be rewarded by the removal of British control of Afghanistan's external affairs. On February 2, 1919, the amir raised the issue of independence in a letter to the viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, and even asked for Afghanistan's inclusion at the peace negotiations at Versailles. The viceroy was sympathetic to the independence of Afghanistan and wrote to Edwin Montagu, the secretary of state for Indian affairs, that since it was not likely that Britain would be able to enforce the restrictions on Afghanistan foreign affairs and would not go to war on this issue, there seemed little point in clinging to an out-of-date provision that was not worth alienating Habibullah over.[30] The matter, however, was not seen in India and London of such importance, and no reply was sent to the amir's correspondence. The issue soon became the driving force behind a much stronger movement in Afghanistan that paved the way for the third Anglo-Afghan war three months later.

The amir did not live to see this war. About two weeks after the letter, the amir was on a hunting outing in Laghman and was murdered in his tent. The motive for his assassination and the conspirators behind the plot were never disclosed. A colonel of the guards became the scapegoat and was immediately executed, while interested parties used the act to support their own interests. One theory is that the nationalist party was behind the plot since they were unhappy with the amir's failure to secure the country's full independence by force during World War I when the British

were weaker or to obtain independence as a reward for the country's neutrality during the war. Other theories pointed to certain groups linked to the court, including the Mosaheban family, as the instigators behind the murder. Some contemporary Afghan sources allege that Amanullah Khan and his mother, the powerful queen, were the masterminds of the plot.

Amir Amanullah and the Declaration of Independence

Upon the death of Habibullah, his brother Sardar Nasrullah Khan, who was in the winter capital in Jalalabad, proclaimed himself the amir and was endorsed by the late amir's eldest son and heir apparent, Sardar Inayatullah. His claim, however, was challenged by Habibullah's third son, Amanullah, who was in Kabul and in control of the government departments, the headquarters of the army, and the treasury. Lacking reliable troops and enough money to pay them, Nasrullah and his party moved to Kabul, where he offered his allegiance to Amanullah, and he was formally declared the amir.

On March 3, 1919, in his first correspondence with Viceroy Chelmsford, Amir Amanullah notified him of the death of his father and his own accession. Amanullah represented himself as the ruler of the free and independent government of Afghanistan. He wrote, "Our independent and free Government of Afghanistan considers itself ready and prepared at every time and season to conclude, with due regard to every consideration for the requirements of friendship and the like, such agreements and treaties with the mighty Government of England as may be useful and serviceable in the way of commercial gains and advantages to our Government and yours."[31]

Uncertain about the impact of the transition of power in Kabul, the British government initially did not pay much attention to the young amir's claim of independence. Meanwhile, military authorities in Simla saw no immediate military threat from Afghanistan as a result of the changing of the guard in Kabul. In his letter to Edwin Montagu, the secretary of state for India (1917–1922), the viceroy indicated that the amir would have to establish himself firmly in Kabul before he took any actions against the British. A week later, the amir's call for independence came loud and clear through his message to his compatriots. "I have placed the crown on my head," he addressed his people in a *firman*, "in the name of integrity and of the free and independent administration of the internal and external affairs of Afghanistan. I also give you the good news that you are a free nation. You are not under the protection or supervision of any foreign power." In an obvious breach of protocol, the British government failed to reply to Amanullah's letter immediately. It took about two months to have King George V send a conspicuously belated message of condolence to Amanullah on the death of his father and effectively recognize his regime.

By the time the letter from London was sent, Amanullah had taken practical steps in support of his bid for full independence. He had sent envoys to Persia, Bukhara, and the Leninist government of the Soviet Union. It was not likely that the British government would go to war over Afghanistan's call for independence. But it could not allow the claim to be unchallenged or granted unconditionally. Further, it would be necessary to use force to retaliate against any military action by the amir in support of his claim. Meanwhile, the amir's tough statements just two months after his ascending the throne were not preceded by full military preparations and coordinated planning. This fueled speculation that his decision to confront the British was linked to his troubles at home following the mysterious

assassination of his father. The British thought that the young amir's intention was to distract attention from domestic opposition and secure his position by uniting his people against a foreign enemy. "It is clear," wrote Viceroy Chelmsford, "that the people's profound dissatisfaction with Amanullah's enquiry into Habibullah's murder and suspicions of Amanullah's own complicity are the cause of the Amir's anti-British policy. Finding his position untenable and encouraged by grossly exaggerated accounts of disturbances in India, Amanullah has been driven to avert rebellion against himself by proclaiming *Jihad* and promising easy conquest of India."[32]

There is no doubt about Amanullah's anti-British sentiment and his staunch activism for the country's freedom from the British yoke. He belonged to the "War Party" at the Afghan court during the First World War, advocating war against the British to reclaim the territory of the Afghan (Pashtun) tribes lost to the British as a result of the wars in the nineteenth century. The young amir was influenced from an early age by anti-British sentiments, first from his mother, Ulya-Hazrat, the powerful queen, and later by his father-in-law, Mahmud Tarzi. Tarzi owned the country's only newspaper. He used his paper to promote pan-Islamic and anticolonial messages: "Amanullah's anti-British feelings continued to grow and flourish during his entire reign. . . . Both sentiments and policy thus impelled Amanullah to try to unite the country which was still reeling from the shock of Habibullah's mysterious death and Amanullah's seizure of the throne. He did so by launching a holy war of independence against the British."[33] Further, Amanullah saw a close link between his goal of gaining full independence from the British and the prospects of the long-term political, social, and economic modernization of Afghanistan through beneficial relations with the outside world. This connection was missed by the British, which initially attributed Amanullah's call for independence as a means to polish his legitimacy amid an

unstable situation following the assassination of his father and to draw support from conservative communities and pro-Turkish and anti-British constituencies.

The fiery address of Amanullah at his first *durbar* on April 13 must have left no doubt in the minds of any skeptics about the determination of the amir. Holding his first public court (*durbar*) on April 13, the amir reemphasized his nation's total freedom. "I have declared my country entirely free, autonomous, and independent, both internally and externally . . . no foreign power will be allowed to have a hairsbreadth of right to interfere internally and externally with the affairs of Afghanistan, and if anyone does I am ready to cut its throat with this sword." At this point he turned to the attending British representative (*Wakil*) in Kabul, Saifullah Khan, saying, "O *Safir* [Envoy], have you understood what I have said?" The *Wakil* acknowledged getting the message. In less than a month, Amanullah's sword made a showing on the battlefield against the British.

During March and April 1919, a series of events convinced the amir that the situation inside Afghanistan and in the region was becoming favorable to forcing the British government to recognize Afghanistan's full independence in the face of threats of military force. Domestically he was riding a wave of nationalistic sentiment, and regionally he was utilizing intense Muslim feelings hurt by the defeat of Turkey in World War I and Hindu and Muslim discontent with British rule in India. Wartime shortages of food and goods, the massive enlistment of Indians to meet the wartime recruitment demands, the failure to respond to the calls for home rule by India's political movement, and public disenchantment for not being rewarded for the country's sacrifices during the war caused a wave of rioting and disturbances, particularly in Punjab. The unpopular Criminal Law Amendment, known as the Rowlatt Act (named after the judge who presided over its adoption), allowed jail sentences without trial and trial without jury. The amendment and other

social and political grievances fueled riots in several cities in the north and west of India. The rioters attacked government buildings and railways. The most ominous incident occurred on April 13, 1919, when a crowd of nonviolent Sikhs, celebrating a religious festival in the Jallianwala Bagh garden in Amritsar, Punjab, unknowingly defied a ban on meetings. The crowd was attacked by the army, which, during a ten-minute shooting spree, killed between 370 to a 1,000 or more Sikhs. The troops fired their bullets mainly toward the few open gates through which people were trying to flee. The brutality sent shock waves across the entire nation, fueling widespread anger and leading to the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920–1922.

In a *firman* issued by Amanullah at the beginning of May, he stated that in view of the anti-British uprising in India, which he considered a justified reaction to the British failure to reward the sacrifices made by the Hindu and Muslim subjects during the war, he had sent the Afghan commander in chief, Saleh Mohammad Khan, with an army to the eastern frontier to prevent the spread of disturbances in India into Afghanistan. On May 2, Saleh Mohammad Khan with his advance party reached Dakka, where he was joined by 2,000 more troops on the following days. Another column of 1,500 troops was sent to Kandahar under Prime Minister Sardar Abdul Qodus Khan and 2,000 more troops were sent to Khost to join Mohammad Nader Khan.

Meanwhile, Kabul sent emissaries with money and munitions for distribution among the frontier tribes as well as into India to win the cooperation of anti-British elements in support of the Afghan campaign. The success of the Afghan plan depended on a number of assumptions: simultaneous attacks on widely separated fronts with little communication between them; a coordinated response of the frontier tribes to the call for *Jihad*; the synchronization of the internal troubles in India with the commencement of the operation; and the resulting disaffection of the Indian army.

Tension Increases on the Border

Amanullah had given strict orders that no advance was to be made until he gave the word. He had also told the frontier governors that they should warn their subordinates to “be on the alert [lest] any Afghan subject should foolishly commit some foolishness in British territory.” And he told his agents in Peshawar not to issue, without his personal sanction, passports to Kabul to any Hindu or Muslim British subject who had taken part in riots in India.[34]

These instructions notwithstanding, the Afghan activities on the frontier rapidly developed into a conflict situation, leading to open war. On May 2, General Saleh Mohammad, with an escort of two guns and two companies of infantry, toured the frontier under the guise of a border inspection and made a personal inspection of the water springs at Bagh, which was a disputed area on the Durand Line. On May 3, a party of Khyber Rifles detailed to escort a caravan was stopped by armed Afghans led by a Shinwari tribal figure, Zar Shah, in the disputed area between Landi Khana and Torkham. Later in the day, Zar Shah, pretending he was acting under the orders of the Afghan commander in chief, killed five unarmed laborers who were working on a water project for the British post in the Khyber Pass at Landi Kotal. This violence was followed by 150 Afghan regular soldiers occupying Bagh village (located across the putative border) and the Kafir Kot ridge (overlooking the village). Bagh, a green zone less than a mile long, was of strategic importance, as it controlled the water streams and the pumping station that supplied water to the Landi Kotal. On May 4, the British demanded that Anwar Khan (the Afghan commander) and his men leave Bagh, which the British considered on their side of the border. Instead, the Afghan unit cut off the water to Landi Kotal. The same day, further reinforcements of *Khassadars* (local militia) and Shinwari tribesman reached Bagh, while hordes of Afghan tribes of

Moh-mand and Shinwari poured into Jalalabad and received rifles to join the holy war (*Jihad*). On May 5, further reinforcements of Afghan regulars arrived at Bagh and the Kafir Kot ridge.

It is unclear whether the occupation of the Bagh by the Afghan regular forces was intended to start the war. If it were the case, the move was a premature act at best, since most of the political and military assets that the amir depended upon were not fully deployed or closely coordinated. If the action at Bagh was just a reconnaissance in force or a move in coordination, with the planned Afghan-orchestrated uprising in Peshawar slated for May 8, then the Afghans missed a golden opportunity by not immediately marching on Landi Kotal. During this critical period the British garrison at Landi Kotal consisted of two companies of Indian infantry, two mountain guns, a squad of sappers and miners, and 500 men of the Khyber Rifles. The capture of Landi Kotal would have drawn the Afridi and Shinwari tribes to the Afghan army side and could have threatened Peshawar, turning the operational situation in favor of the Afghan army.[35] Instead, the Afghan regular battalions sat inactive at Bagh, allowing the British to build up a striking force at Landi Kotal, which not only drove out the Afghan troops from Bagh but also invaded the Afghan territory up to the border town of Dakka and was ready to advance on Jalalabad. Meanwhile, the inactivity allowed the British authority to nip the planned Afghan-organized uprising in Peshawar in the bud. Further, British quick reaction against the occupation of Bagh discouraged the Pashtun tribes north of the Kabul River as well as the Afridi, Shinwari, and Orakzai tribes on the British side of the border from fully committing themselves to the Afghan cause.

Reacting to the Afghan incursion at Bagh, Viceroy Chelmsford sent a message to the Afghan amir demanding that he arrest Zar Shah and repudiate the *firman* declaring an anti-British *Jihad* as a forgery. But when on May 5 more

Afghan regular forces arrived at Bagh, the British command began sending reinforcement to Landi Kotal. The buildup of forces on the frontier was hindered by impending troubles in Peshawar, where the Afghanistan post office had turned into the center of Afghan propaganda and the postmaster, Ghulam Haidar Khan, acted as the amir's principle agent in mobilizing the anti-British forces in support of the Afghan cause. The postmaster had been summoned to Kabul and was given copies of leaflets for distribution in India calling on the Indian Muslims to support Afghanistan in its war with the British.[36] Ghulam Haidar had convinced the amir of the feasibility of the uprising through his exaggerated reports claiming that large numbers of anti-British elements in India were waiting to join the Afghan army once it advanced into India.

On May 7, the North West Frontier chief commissioner, Sir Roos-Keppel, received reports of the postmaster's plans to stage riots on the following day in Peshawar. Roos-Keppel was highly experienced in Pashtun tribal affairs and well connected to the tribes. He spoke Pashto and had authored one of the first Pashto-language dictionaries. The Afghan postmaster had been left at large although war was declared on May 6, and the Indian Revolutionary Committee in Peshawar city had arranged to collect a mob of seven thousand men in order to burn the British cantonments and civil lines, damage the railway, and destroy the mobilization stores.[37] The British authorities decided to arrest the agitators, who were hidden within the maze of narrow alleys and hard to capture. Therefore, the British decided to cordon off the walled city, secure the gates, and threaten to cut water and electricity to the town unless the postmaster and his accomplices were turned in. On the afternoon of May 8, during the "siesta" hour, a force of five battalions and two armored car batteries moved in four columns and secured all the Peshawar gates. They then announced that until the plotters were handed over, no one would be allowed to enter

or leave the city. The mob was thoroughly frightened by the show of force and the tight measures taken by the military. The Afghan postmaster and 22 of the revolutionary leaders were brought in by sunset, and the siege was lifted.

As the tension on the frontier created fears of tribal uprisings and the desertion of tribal militia, the British command decided to resort to force to expel the Afghans from Bagh and launch preemptive operations on other fronts as needed. On May 6, when reinforcements were on their way to Landi Kotal, the British government ordered mobilization and declared war on Afghanistan—a war that is known as the third Anglo-Afghan war.

The Third Anglo-Afghan War

The Third Anglo-Afghan war differs from the two previous wars fought by the British in Afghanistan during the nineteenth century. The distinction is in terms of the political context, the purpose of the war, the time and space dimensions, the intensity of violence, and the outcome of the conflict. The war in 1919 lasted about one month and was fought mostly in the frontier region. The intensity of violence in the quick encounter was lower than that of the previous Anglo-Afghan wars, and it resulted in the removal of British control over Afghanistan’s external affairs.

The political context of the previous two wars was shaped by the geopolitics of the Great Game while the third war was driven by Afghan nationalism on the one side and the imperatives of keeping the Indian frontier safe amid the post–World War I upheavals in India on the other. The Afghan postmaster in Peshawar, Ghulam Haidar, was feeding Kabul information suggesting that the Indian government lacked sufficient troops to deal effectively with a potential uprising.[38] These perceptions suggested that the odds were in favor of the Afghan ruler, while rationally the correlation of

forces presented a different picture. In spite of the wartime drain on the British forces, its army in India was double its prewar numbers and could be augmented by more troops. Further, despite the internal troubles in India, a lack of organization hindered the popular resentments from mobilizing into a national uprising. There were certain conservative elements, including the princely states, that supported the British Government and even the Afghan ex-amir Yaqub Khan offered his support to the Viceroy from his exile home in India. Amanullah was also being fed with exaggerated reports of disturbances in India by the Indian revolutionaries of the "Provisional Government" of India based in Kabul and his other agents in the British territories.

The Opposing Military Forces

On the eve of the war the regular Afghan army consisted of 21 cavalry regiments, 75 infantry battalions, and three pioneer (engineer and construction) battalions. The artillery included 280 breech-loading guns while an equal number of muzzle-loader cannons were deployed on the Persian and Russian frontiers. The total number of the regular troops included 35,000 foot, 8,000 mounted soldiers, and 4,000 gunners. Of this, five cavalry regiments and 35 infantry battalions with 107 guns were deployed on the frontier with India. The strategic reserve based in Kabul comprised the elite units of the *Ardal* and *Ardalian* guard regiments and other formations adding up to over seven cavalry regiments, 20 infantry battalions (including three pioneers), and 108 guns. The remaining troops were stationed on the Russian and Persian borders.[39]

Most of the Afghan army was armed with modern weapons imported during the reign of Amir Habibullah, who on the basis of the treaty from 1905 was given a free hand in importing arms through India. About half of the Afghan

regular infantry, particularly the elite *Ardal* and the *Ardalian* guard units, were armed with modern small-bore repeating rifles—the German 7.92 x 57 mm, the 7.65 x 53 mm Turkish Mauser, the British .303 Lee Metford rifle, or the British .303 Martini-Enfield.[40] The remaining were equipped with the breech-loading, single-shot Martini-Henry or Snider rifles. The authorized strength of the infantry battalion in Kabul and Jalalabad was up to 1,000 men and elsewhere it was 500. At the breakout of the war no battalion was more than 75 percent of its strength. The cavalry riding on sturdy ponies was more of a mounted infantry rather than a cavalry suitable for shock action. It was armed with carbines and swords. The number of troopers in a cavalry regiment was 600 in Kabul and 300 elsewhere. The Afghan artillery had 100 mm Krupp howitzers, 75 mm Krupp mountain (pack) guns and a number of 7-pounder mountain pieces. The army had a number of outdated multibarrel crank-operated Gardener machine guns.[41] A contingent of 10,000 *Khassadars* was employed for local security. The regular army was rapidly augmented by thousands of irregular forces who carried their own weapons and supplies for several days.

The Afghan soldiers were known for their courage and endurance, but except for some elite units in Kabul, most of the troops were drafted, poorly trained, inadequately paid, and poorly led. Many units were below strength and lacked high mobility due to limited transport. The movement of the army was facilitated by storing supplies at the state granaries, which were located along the main roads at 12-mile intervals. All regular units were clothed in ceremonial uniforms, and the Kabul garrison was issued a khaki service dress and ankle boots and a round, black lambskin cap with a metal badge bearing the Afghan crest. The majority of the regular army units were concentrated along the border with British India and included: six battalions and four guns in Kunar; 15 infantry battalions, one and a half cavalry

regiments, and 44 guns on the Nangrahar and Khyber axis; 18 infantry battalions, four cavalry regiments, and 60 guns on the Khost and Kurram Valley line; 13 infantry battalions, three cavalry regiments, and 60 guns in Kandahar; and 11 infantry battalions, 5.5 cavalry regiments, and 43 guns kept in reserve in Kabul.

In 1919, the British forces in India were organized in the two northern and southern armies, which consisted of eight infantry divisions, five independent brigades, three cavalry brigades, and one mounted brigade.[42] Of these, the field army for service in the North West Frontier of India consisted of the 1st Division (Peshawar), the 2nd Division (Rawalpindi), the 16th Division (Lahore), the 10th Cavalry Brigade (with one regiment based at Peshawar, one at Mardan, and one at Rawalpindi), the 1st Cavalry Brigade (Risalpur), the 4th Cavalry Brigade (Meerut), and three independent infantry brigades deployed at Kohat, Bannu, and Derajat. Further, the 4th Division and the 12th Mounted Brigade under the Army Headquarters were based near Quetta.[43]

On the eve of the war, however, all units were understrength and short of senior officers, and few units were combat ready. Meanwhile, due to the demobilization of British personnel, a large number of men had left for England without being replaced. Only eight regular British battalions were left in India for the whole period of the Great War. Nevertheless, the introduction of modern weapons, equipment, and transport significantly increased the capability of the British units. The increasing number of machine guns and the magazine rifles significantly enhanced the effectiveness of the infantry. The use of Lewis guns,[44] trench mortars, and hand grenades increased their fire power while armored cars and motorized lorries brought unprecedented speed in maneuver, and the wireless improved battlefield command and control. Further the introduction of combat aircraft not only provided close fire

support to the ground troops but also, by bombing the Afghan troops' concentrations in the depth, restricted the Afghan ability to reinforce the frontline troops rapidly. Although the nascent Royal Air Force's (RAF) BE-2c, a single engine two-seater reconnaissance and light bomber biplane, could fly at a speed of 72 miles per hour at a 6,500-foot altitude and stay airborne for about three hours, it was unrivaled over the Afghan battlefield for its destructive and psychological impact.

The Afghan Aim of War and the Campaign Plan

Amanullah's vital interest for which he was prepared to go to war was regaining control of his country's external affairs and making Afghanistan fully independent. His strategy was based on three interlinked actions coordinated at the strategic level. Its first component was simultaneous attacks in mid-May by regular troops supported by hordes of *ghazi* fighters, on the Peshawar, Kurram, and Baluchistan frontiers. The second element of the plan was the synchronization of the army action with a widespread uprising of the Pashtun tribes in the frontier area as well as riots in India that would tie up the British forces and limit their interference with the Afghan offensive. And finally the plan counted on the mutiny of the native Indian regiments, particularly the Muslim regiments and their alliance with the advancing Afghan forces. Given the topographic nature of the country, there were six theaters of operations across the Durand Line: Chitral, the Khyber, the Kurram, North and South Waziristan, the Zhob, and Baluchistan. The Afghan command used all these routes for incursions across the Durand Line.

The mobilization of the tribes was critical to the whole Afghan plan. Afghan agents were deployed on both sides of the Durand Line in early 1919 to rally support among the

frontier tribesmen, including those who were in the service of the British authorities.

At the turn of the century, Governor General Lord Curzon (in office 1899–1905) separated the districts west of the Indus River from the Punjab government and integrated them into a newly established North West Frontier Province under a chief commissioner, with its center at Peshawar. This freed the Pashtun tribes from the Punjab domination that had existed since 1834, when Ranjit Sigh annexed the area down to Peshawar into the Sikh state of Punjab. With this administrative change, Lord Curzon withdrew the regular British troops from the tribal territory lying between the Afghan and the British-controlled areas and replaced them with tribal militia recruited from the independent Pashtun tribes.

The militias were organized into battalions like the regular army, and were commanded by selected Indian army officers. They were divided into companies of 100 rifles each, and the number of such companies in the battalion was determined by local requirements. In addition, every battalion had one company of mounted infantry while the Kurram militia maintained two 10-pounder mountain guns. The militiamen were armed with the .303 Lee-Enfield rifle with the short bayonet. The units came under the chief commissioner, North West Frontier Province. There were six militia corps deployed on the frontier, including the Chitral Scouts, the Mohmand Militia, the Khyber Rifles (2 battalions), the Kurram Militia, the North Waziristan Militia, and the South Waziristan Militia. The militiamen were mostly recruited from selected local tribes.[45] Two other irregular corps serving in Baluchistan were the Zhob Militia and the Makran Levy.

The loose British control of the tribal area provided the Afghans the potential to turn the tribes against the British in support of their military operation. Cooperation from the tribes, however, depended on some level of action by the Afghan army within their respective territory and close

coordination of the army operation with the tribes. But in spite of the clarity of Amanullah's objectives and his political strategy to achieve them, his means and ways were disjointed, inadequate, and uncoordinated. Consequently, except in Waziristan, tribal cooperation was mostly patchy.

In a dispatch on the war, the commander in chief of India, General Munro, wrote:

> The tribal offensive was, in fact the basis of the whole plan, and the line of action to be taken by the Afghan army depended entirely on the extent to which the tribes consented to cooperate and on the subsequent success of their operations. Their best and only chance of success lay in securing the cooperation of the tribes and to coordinate their efforts. The looseness of our political control over a large portion of the border territory made it a promising field for such activity.[46]

The British Campaign Plan

By May 6, the British authorities received information that the Afghans planned to attack on three main axes, including the Khyber front under the command of the commander in chief Saleh Mohammad Khan, the Khost front under the command of General Nader Khan, and the Kandahar axis headed by Prime Minister Sardar Abdul Qodus Khan. The plan was to launch the attacks simultaneously within the next 10 days in conjunction with deliberately coordinated riots in India aimed at tying up the British troops. Accordingly, on the same day, the Indian government issued a formal declaration of war[47]—a move that was later used by Amanullah to blame the British for starting the war.

The British campaign plan was based on an offensive operation on the Khyber line and defense on the other main axes. It intended to launch an offensive operation with the main strike against Jalalabad in order to divide the Afridi, Shinwari, and Mohmand tribes, destroy the Afghan concentration on the axis, and compel the Afghan forces to withdraw from the frontier area. Their plan envisaged an

active defense on the other fronts along the border, temporarily evacuating the area held by the frontier militias between the administrative and political borders.[48] This would avoid being besieged by rebellious tribes, necessitating relief operations and tying up transport and logistic resources.

The campaign was directed by the commander in chief of India, General Charles Munro, from Army Headquarters at Simla. The army was at first organized in two forces: the North West Frontier force under General Sir Arthur Barrett, and the Baluchistan force commanded by Lieutenant General R. Wapshire. The disposition of the troops at the beginning of the campaign was as follows: two divisions and two cavalry brigades on the Khyber axis; one infantry brigade on the Kohat-Kurram line; two infantry brigades in Waziristan; and one division, one cavalry brigade, and two mixed brigades on the Baluchistan front. As the operation developed, the command was further decentralized with the formation of the Waziristan force at the end of May when the whole of Waziristan rose up in arms.

Operation on the Khyber Line

By the evening of May 6, the Afghan forces in and around Bagh included three infantry battalions and two guns. The Afghan command also had dispatched 350 infantry with two guns from Dakka to threaten the northern flank of the British garrison at Landi Kotal. They occupied the *Tor Tsappar* (black ridge) and *Spina Tsuka* (white peak) about five miles north of Landi Kotal. Meanwhile, Shinwaris and Mohmands from Afghan territory were gathering and joining the Afghan army. At Dakka, about 13 miles from Landi Kotal, there were another five infantry battalions, 200 cavalry, and 6 guns. By May 8, the British concentration at Landi Kotal amounted to five infantry battalions, two cavalry troops (Lancers), two

batteries of artillery, and a machinegun company grouped into the 1st Infantry Brigade under Brigadier General Crocker.

At the same time, the Afghans on *Tor Tsappar* and *Spina Tsuka* were reinforced by tribesmen who had advanced and seized the Ash Khel ridge, one mile north of Landi Kotal. The tribesmen were now in a position from which they could either attack the fort or raid the Peshawar plain to the north through Mullagoris country. To block such a move, the 1st Lancers Regiment was moved to Shahgai Thana, 12 miles northwest of Peshawar. Meanwhile, on arrival to Landi Kotal, the 1st Brigade dislodged the Afghan detachment from the Ash Khel ridge and established a strong piquet line from Spin Jumat, 2,600 yards northeast of Landi Kotal, along the chain of hills covering the northern flank overlooking the main road. Meanwhile, the British also seized and piquetted the hills, flanking the road in the south stretching westward to the Tangi stream.

General Crocker decided to attack the Afghan forces around Bagh who were holding a nearly crescent-shaped ridgeline, about 2,000 yards long and south of the main Khyber road. The crescent faces northeast and dominates the Bagh village located in its center. Its left is covered by the precipitous Kafir Kot ridge, and its right rests on the equally difficult Tangi Khwar (stream). Crocker’s plan was to hold and protect his right flank north of the main road and attack the Afghan position south of the road. The correlation of forces was not in favor of the British attack, particularly after Crocker moved the 30th Lancer Regiment, the machine gun company, and a section of 3.7 howitzers to contain the Afghan force north of Landi Kotal. This left only three battalions and two artillery batteries to attack the Afghan position. In an obvious deviation from the classic principle of “economy of forces,” General Crocker shifted too many of his assets to cover his northern flank at the expense of weakening his striking force. The chief commissioner Roos-

Keppel, however, was pushing for a quick action against the Afghans at Bagh, and consequently the attack was launched by inadequate forces, predictably leading to failure.

Crocker ordered the attacking units to move south of the Landi Kotal camp in the dark and then, advancing westward, seize a prominent height known as Bright's Hill, located on the east side of the Tangi Khwar on the Afghans' right. From thence they would advance west to retake the water supply, which was in the hands of the Afghans. Once the water source was secured, the attack was to continue to dislodge the Afghan troops from the ridges around Bagh. At 4:45 PM on May 9, the troops designated to cover the advance, including the 2nd Somerset and one section of artillery, moved out and occupied Suffolk Hill, a mile southwest of Landi Kotal and a mile and a half from Bagh. The hill overlooks the road from Jalalabad and the Tangi springs (stream). The hill is 800 yards east of Bright's Hill and about 1,500 yards from the right of the Afghans' position. Under the protection of the covering force, the Sikhs advanced and their two companies captured Bright's Hill without opposition, since the Afghans only occupied it during the day. The remainder of the attacking force (15th Sikhs and 11th Gurkhas) moved round Bright's Hill to the north and occupied a foothold on high ground on the west bank of the Tangi Khwar (stream). The position overlooked Bagh village. The advance halted there due to heavy fire from well-entrenched Afghan troops. At daylight, an increasing number of Afghan troops poured in from their main position at Khargali ridge to the west, leaving the British battalions pinned down on isolated hills between the Landi Kotal and the Tangi stream. By 8:00 PM the attack was completely stalled and was called off. The division commander, General Fowler, ordered Crocker to dig in at the line the brigade had reached (about 900 yards from Bagh) and wait until the remainder of the division could reach Landi Kotal. The 15th Sikh and the 11th Gurkha Battalions consolidated their

ground gained by digging long, shallow trenches in the hard ground and then waited for the renewal of action two days later.

The British setback in the first battle of Bagh coincided with the first bombing mission by the Royal Air Force BE-2c biplanes.[49] They struck the Afghan camp at Dakka just as the Afghan officials were issuing rifles and other supplies to a large body of tribesmen. The first bomb fell in the courtyard of the *Sarhaddar*'s (border commissioner's) house and injured General Saleh Mohammad's foot. Other bombs destroyed his headquarters camp, killing between 25 and 30 soldiers and tribesmen. The sudden strike of bombs from the sky sent everyone scrambling for cover. The tribesmen made it back to the hills, taking along the rifles and other stores from the camp. As the planes cleared the sky, Saleh Mohammad left in a car, telling his deputy that he would send reinforcements from Jalalabad. The reinforcements arrived three days later but made no attempts to reinforce the Afghan battalions at Bagh, who fought bravely on the ground but were vulnerable to the air raids. The bombing, which dismayed the Afghans, boosted the morale of the British frontline troops at Landi Kotal, who were preparing for a second showdown with the Afghan regulars.

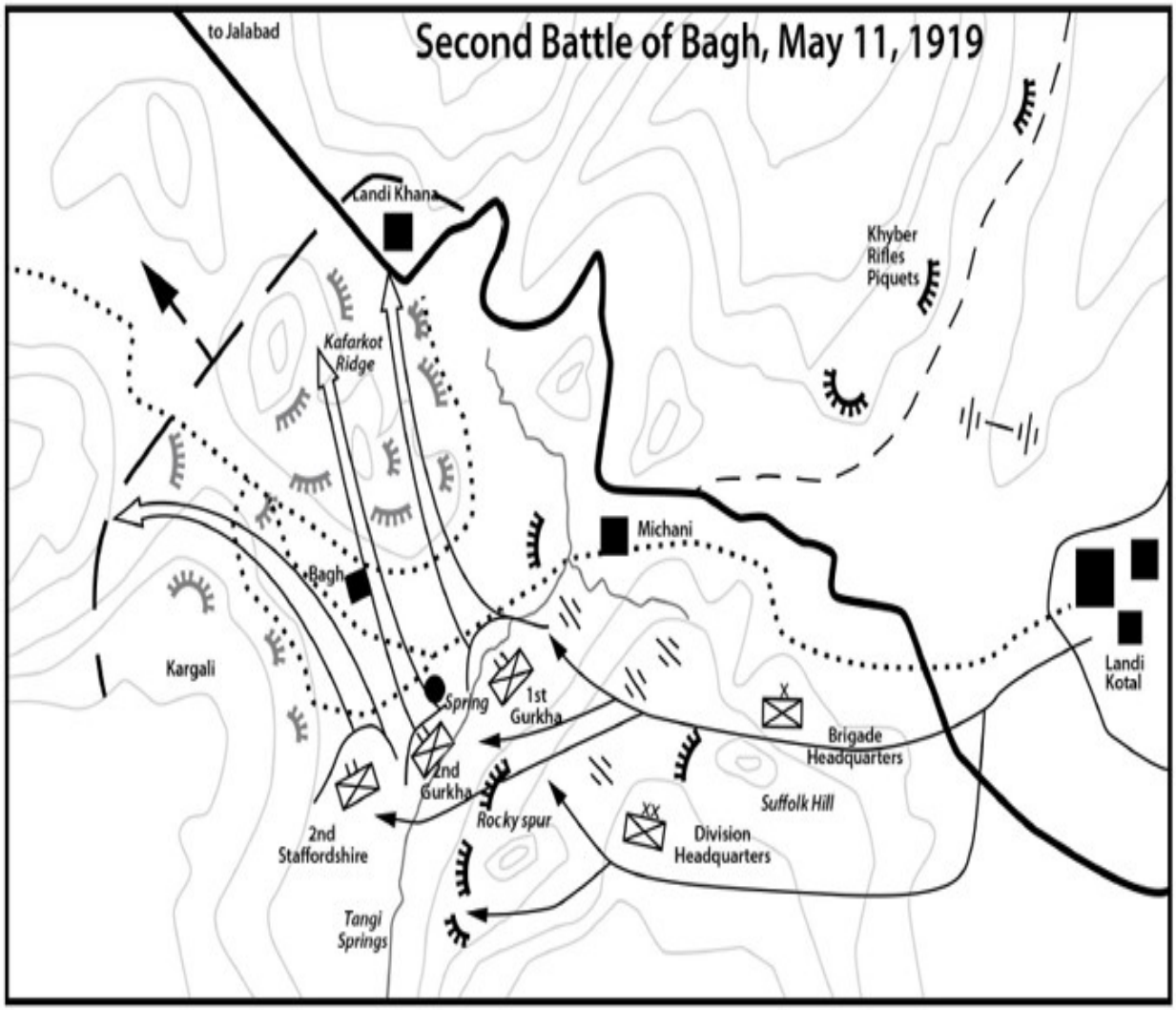
The Second Battle of Bagh and Advance to Dakka

The British failure in the first Battle of Bagh led to an unstable situation at Landi Kotal and beyond. The hills to the south were teeming with large bodies of tribesmen watching the developments around Bagh. In the meantime, a piquet of the Khyber Rifles near Landi Kotal deserted with their rifles. The British command feared that, unless it achieved a certain level of success in military action, large bodies of Afridis would join the Afghan military forces, and

communications with Peshawar would be endangered. General Fowler, the 1st Division commander, arrived at Landi Kotal on the evening of May 9, on the heels of his 2nd Brigade. One and a half battalions of the 3rd Infantry Brigade were due to reach Landi Kotal on the morning of May 11. Taking over the command of the operation, General Fowler saw that any delay in renewing the offensive would encourage the tribes to revolt. Therefore, on May 11, he immediately launched the attack with the available forces at his disposal. These forces included 10 infantry battalions, about three artillery batteries (18 guns), and two machine gun companies, with a total of 22 Vickers machine guns. His plan was for the 2nd Brigade to lead the assault with six battalions covered by the fire of every available gun and machine gun of the 2nd Somerset Light Infantry. Flank protection north of Landi Kotal was provided by one battalion of the 1st Brigade, the 400th Khyber Rifles, and two troops of 30th Lancers, all under the command of Brigadier General Crocker. Three infantry battalions were kept in reserve. The concept of the operation was to force the Afghan right and then to roll up its entire line. Following a reconnaissance on May 10, an artillery battery and eight machine guns were assigned to engage the Afghan right while another gun battery and 10 machine guns were to neutralize the rest of the Afghan front. The remaining artillery guns were to engage targets as they appeared. Meanwhile, the 2nd Somerset Light Infantry, with four machine guns, was to conduct enfilade fire on the Afghan right from the “Rocky Knoll,” a hill 800 yards southwest of Bright’s Hill.

At 4:30 PM the 2nd Infantry Brigade (the 2nd Battalion North Stafford Regiment, the 2–11th Gurkha, and 2nd Outram’s Rifles, a total of 1,850 bayonets) marched to its assembly area east of Bright’s Hill. Following a thorough reconnaissance at battalion and company level, the main attack was launched at 8:30 PM. Cooperating with the troops already in position since the first Battle of Bagh on May 9,

and systematically covered by artillery and machine gun fire, the lead battalions advanced in company columns. On the left, the 2nd Battalion Staffordshire Regiment advanced steadily up the hill toward its objective on the Afghan right. The heat of the day and the steepness of the slope made it necessary for them to halt at intervals to reform and get their breath. Finally, the battalion dashed forward and drove the Afghans back with a bayonet charge. Some of the Afghans retired south and southwest, where they were caught by the fire of the Somerset Light Infantry and from the four machine guns posted with them. The remainder withdrew to a series of stone-built positions (*sangars*), which formed a second line of defense. The attackers ejected the defenders from this second line with grenades, which were very effective in the confined space. This ended the opposition on the Afghan right. Meanwhile, the 2nd Gurkha moved rapidly over somewhat easier ground, broke through the center of the Afghan line, and captured its guns. Thence the battalion pushed forward to take the Khargali ridge further to the west.



The Second Battle of Bagh, May 11, 1919.

On the right, the 1–11th Gurkha Rifles advanced through Bagh village and, after clearing it, pressed on and captured the ridge, which formed the right center of the Afghan position. One company swarmed up the precipitous side of Kafir Kot, taking the extreme left of the Afghan line, and capturing a gun and a Gardiner machine gun. The 2–123rd Outram’s Rifles were then pushed up behind the 2–11th Gurkha Rifles to take the Khargali ridge. This ended all resistance, and the Afghan troops pulled back in all directions. Due to the exhaustion of the troops and the difficulties of the terrain, the attacking columns were unable

to pursue the retiring Afghan troops. The Royal Air Force, however, followed the retreating troops and inflicted losses on them with bombing and machine gun fire.

British casualties included eight killed and 31 wounded. The Afghans reportedly lost heavily, and the British buried 66 Afghan defenders the next day. One account states that the Afghan battle losses numbered 100 killed and 300 wounded.[50] Five Afghan artillery pieces and one machine gun were captured. At 2:00 PM, after the fighting, the British established a piquet line running from the Kafir Kot ridge through Khargali village to the North Staffords' objective.

Unhappy with the turn of the events on the frontier, Amanullah sent a letter to the viceroy accusing the British forces of violating Afghan land and air space, claiming that he had sent troops to the frontier solely to prevent the spread of unrest in India into Afghanistan. Earlier, the amir had criticized the British authorities for the arrest of his postmaster in Peshawar. He regretted "thousands of times" that the British were still not prepared to recognize Afghanistan's complete independence. He hoped to do his best through his well-meaning endeavors so that "the doors of calamity may not be opened upon the world for it is right to demand right and not to shed blood without right in the path of right."[51]

The British government, however, was not moved and countered the Afghan propaganda to the tribes with leaflets scattered by Royal Air Force planes advising the "brave and honest people of Afghanistan" that the Afghan army had been defeated and its guns captured by the mighty British Army. Then, in an attempt to discredit the amir, the leaflet stated, "Will the people of Afghanistan allow this inexperienced youth, false to the memory of his martyred father, false to the interests of his country, false to the dictates of the Holy Quran, to bring calamity to the brave people and fair country of Afghanistan? God forbid."[52]

The British tactical victory at Bagh could not impress the tribes until it was expanded into operational and strategic gains. On April 13, Roos-Keppel wrote to the viceroy that

> the sample of the [Afghan] army that we had to fight in the last few days fought better than I expected with courage and tenacity, but they have no organized comissariat or transport and are incapable of conducting a campaign on a large scale. A greater danger than the Afghans are tribes, that they have not risen against us is extraordinary. The greatest danger is in the state of northern India. A large number of people hate us with such bitterness that they would welcome even an invasion if they saw a chance of getting rid of us.[53]

Therefore, Roos-Kepel insisted on winning a quick and spectacular victory by exploiting the advantage of air power. There were 24 planes available in Peshawar and the commissioner believed that bombing Dakka and possibly Jalalabad would not only break the resistance of the Afghan army but also make a major impression on the wavering tribes to discourage their siding with the Afghan government or rising up in arms against the British authority.

In order to demonstrate a greater show of force, the army needed a wider space to deploy sufficient forces. The Dakka plain, 13 miles to the west, offered a suitable location for the deployment of a division with landing strips for the aircraft. Further, Dakka was in striking distance of Jalalabad. In any case, inactivity on the British part could drive the wavering tribes to join their Afghan kinsmen. Therefore, on May 12, General Fowler, commander of the 1st Division, received orders to open the road from the Khyber Pass to Dakka and occupy Dakka with a cavalry brigade in advance of a larger force concentration.

Such an advance was politically of great value, but it entailed numerous military problems, including the risks of getting bogged down in fighting local tribes. One of the main challenges was keeping the line of communication open through the mountainous area, which necessitated a whole brigade to piquet the craggy flanks of the road from Landi

Kotal to Dakka. The North West Frontier Province chief commissioner, Roos-Kepel, however, was keen on advancing into the Afghan territory.

On May 13, 1919, the covering force to open and piquet the road to Dakka assembled at the ruins of the camp at Landi Khana, a relic of the second Anglo-Afghan war. At 6:00 AM, the advance guard crossed the Afghan border at Torkham and met no opposition since the Afghan post at Haft Chah had retired to Jalalabad. As the detachment proceeded, it dropped off platoon-sized units to man piquets along the flanks. All the infantry was used to piquet the 13-mile stretch of road toward Dakka. A battalion would then move from the rear to support further advance. The column reached Loe Dakka at 10:00 AM with no opposition. The bombing of the area during previous days forced the Afghan regulars to retire westward toward Jalalabad. When Dakka was secured, the 1st Cavalry Brigade, under Brigadier General Baldwin, moved through the piquetted road and camped at Dakka. They secured the Dakka plain, an expanse of four miles by four miles. By May 16, all elements of the 1st Brigade under Brigadier General Crocker arrived in Loe Dakka and General Crocker assumed command there.

The advance to Dakka and its military occupation were an operational achievement but it spawned more security problems. The British learned firsthand, through their previous military actions in Afghanistan, that defeating Afghan regulars hardly translated into sustainable control of the territory. Having little control beyond the range of their rifles and artillery, the British forces had to be on constant alert and in combat readiness to withstand surprise attacks from any quarter. The Dakka camp was exposed to threats from the hilly country to the west and south. The threat from the north was across the Kabul River, where the Mohmand and Shinwar tribesmen, under the great mullah of Chaknahur and tribal leaders, including Mir Sayed Pacha, Mir Zaman

Kunari, Sardar Khan Mohmand, and many others, were up in arms against the *Farangi* invaders.[54]

In Kabul, Amanullah reacted emotionally to the British incursions, and in a public speech to the citizens of Kabul and tribal representatives at the Eidgah Mosque on May 15, he condemned the British aggression and called for *Jihad* against the infidels and vowed to drive the enemy out as the Afghans did in the past. “It became incumbent on your King,” he announced, “to proclaim *Jihad* in the path of God against the perfidious English Government.”[55] Thus the British declaration of war on May 6 was reciprocated by the Afghan government declaration on May 15.

The call to *Jihad* mobilized the people around the common cause of defending their homeland, and military preparations increased. Reinforcements were sent to Jalalabad under General Mohammad Omar Khan, commonly known as *Soor Jarnail* (the Red General). The Afghan command on the Khyber axis was augmented with experienced military leaders, including Ghulam Nabi Khan Charkhi, son of Ghulam Haidar Charkhi, the commander in chief under Amir Abdur Rahman. The enhanced Afghan army in the Nangrahar dispatched a strong column of about eight regular battalions with 10 guns[56] to Bassawal. This force numbered some 3,000 men under General Mohammad Omar. Its forward column advanced to Girdi Ghaus. It was ordered to drive the enemy out of Loe Dakka, some six miles to the east of Girdi Ghaus. The Afghan columns were so well concealed in the villages and nearby terrain that the British reconnaissance on May 14 and 15 failed to detect them. Even the British eyes in the sky missed them as the Royal Air Force reconnaissance flights to Bassawal reported no presence of Afghan forces.

The British command found their new camp in Dakka exposed to constant threats from the surrounding hilly country. General Fowler arrived in Loe Dakka on May 16 with

the remaining units of the 1st Brigade; he was very much displeased with the insecure location of the camp, which was dominated by hills to the south and the west. He ordered the relocation of the camp to a more-defendable location between Rabat and the Sherabad cantonment some two miles to the west. On May 16, a British reinforced reconnaissance detachment with guns was sent through the Kamkay (Khord) Khyber Pass toward Bassawal, some 13 miles to the west, to explore the area and locate the Afghan forces. The detachment stumbled into the main body of General Omar's forces and suffered heavily in clashes with the forward element of the Afghan column. The detachment was forced to retire under the cover of artillery fire while it was hotly pursued by the Afghan regulars. The Afghan army occupied the hills around the British camp and began shelling and strafing the enemy camp below. The following day (May 17) an attack by about three British regiments from the camp to dislodge the Afghans from the surrounding hills failed after the troops suffered heavy losses. Finally, it took a renewed major offensive on May 18 by the British camp, reinforced by a brigade shifted from Landi Kotal, to overwhelm the Afghan forces and drive them out of the hills around the Dakka camp.

The British losses were relatively high, bringing the total casualties of the two-day military action at Dakka up to 285, including 39 killed. British sources estimated the Afghan losses on May 16 and 17 at 200 killed and 300 to 500 wounded. They left five of their 10 Krupp guns behind.[57] As many observers, including the British official records, indicate, the Afghans once again missed the opportunity to win a possibly easy victory by pursuing their successful attack on the British camp on May 16 before it was reinforced on May 17. A determined counterattack on the isolated bodies of men, who were trapped close to their position and unsupported by artillery fire, would have succeeded through the weight of numbers. The failure of the

Afghan troops to take advantage of the situation is mostly attributed to poor leadership, a lack of professional training, low maneuverability, and their want of cohesiveness in the basic drills of close combat. These prevented them from taking advantage of “their initial success, and from wiping out the weak forces sent out against them in detail.”[58] After the battle, the British moved their camp about two miles to the west under the Rabat Fort hills, which were heavily piquetted.

Meanwhile, the situation around Peshawar deteriorated. There were raids into the Peshawar cantonment area, snipers fired at sentries along the Khyber defile, and tribesmen launched attacks, particularly in the vicinity of Ali Masjid. The occupation of Dakka had an opposite effect on the lines of communication as troubles broke out in the British rear all along the Khyber Pass, which was guarded by the Khyber Rifles. While the 1st Division was engaged in military action at Dakka, the Afridis in the Khyber began to show signs of restlessness. The militia, which was responsible for guarding the Khyber road, was disbanded due to growing desertion. They were replaced by regular troops, and additional posts were established in the lower Khyber Pass. On May 15 and 16, an infantry brigade conducted a military operation near Jamrud and secured the heights south of the Khyber stream. By May 19, two divisions were deployed to keep the Peshawar-Dakka route open and secure: the 2nd Division from Peshawar to Landi Kotal inclusive and the 1st Division from Landi-Khana to Dakka.

The deployment of an increasing number of regular troops into security posts following the disbandment of the Khyber Rifles and the gathering of several large *lashkars* in the foothills north of Peshawar left the city in the grips of growing instability. The situation caused the viceroy to consider a renewed advance into Afghanistan, as Roos-Kepel had been advocating for some time. He wrote to Montagu on May 21 that “the only sound policy is to advance on

Jalalabad. . . . We shall by so doing threaten Kabul and force the withdrawal of enemy force from our frontier."[59] Preparation for the move, including the concentration of the 1st Division and the 1st Cavalry Brigade at Dakka as well as resolving the transport problem, had not been completed when the news of the Afghan advance on the Khost-Thal axis on the central front and tribal insurrection in Waziristan shifted the British attention to dealing with an impending threat in the Kurram Valley and Waziristan.

Along with the security operations in the frontier region, air raids were expanded to hit targets deeper inside Afghanistan including Jalalabad and Kabul. A squadron of the RAF carried out bombing missions over Jalalabad between May 19 and 24, hitting large portions of the military quarters, causing physical damage and panic among the population. Kabul was bombed on May 24, when the first plane came at 6:00 AM and dropped several bombs, sending some people to take cover and others to defy the new enemy in the skies by shooting at them with rifles and even revolvers. No one was killed and only a few household horses were injured.[60] The air raids, however, became a factor in convincing the Afghan command to sue for a ceasefire.

The Chitral Front

Preparations for an attack on Chitral began in early May, when the Afghans on the Khyber front crossed the border and occupied Bagh. The Afghan forces in Barikot and Asmar in the Upper Kunar Valley included three infantry battalions, four machine guns, and eight mountain guns. Three Afghan infantry battalions and four guns were positioned at Sarkani and Chagha-Sarai (today's Asadabad) in the lower Kunar Valley. More troops were supposed to reach Kunar from Jalalabad and Kabul. The British armed forces in Chitral consisted of one Native infantry battalion (the 1–11th

Rajputs), the 1,000 strong Chitral Scouts, 2,000 men of the Mehtar of Chitral's contingent, one artillery section, and one machine gun.[61] On May 9, 1919, expecting an Afghan attack, the British garrison commander at Kala Drosh, Lieutenant Colonel Sambourne-Palmer, dispatched security elements to cover the border. Right after the Afghan forces were driven out of Bagh on May 11, Afghan troops on the Chitral front and tribal *lashkars* under Mir Zaman Khan Kunari[62] moved and occupied Arnawai on the Kunar River and advanced rapidly up the river into Chitral and seized posts some eight to 10 miles inside the Chitral territory.[63]

The Afghan command expected that the move by its regulars would inspire the tribes and the Mehtar of Chitral to join the Afghans in the anti-British war. However, few local tribes provided support due to the poor coordination of the campaign with the tribes and the use of a small Afghan force in the initial attack. Further, because of the severity of the weather and difficulties of movement, no reinforcement by regular troops reached the Afghan front line. Meanwhile, the British authorities managed to enlist the cooperation of the Nuristani tribes on the Afghan side in fighting the Afghan forces. On May 14, as the British forces on the Khyber front advanced into Afghanistan and occupied Dakka, the British column in Chitral drove the Afghan troops back to Arnawai (Arandau). On May 23, the British follow-up attack forced the Afghan troops to retire from Arnawai to Asmar. In Chitral, as in Upper Kurram, the Afghans' failure to mobilize the local tribes and the continued loyalty of the militia helped the British garrison to hold their own and foil any major Afghan army inroads into the British-controlled territory in spite of the Afghan tribal fighters' continued incursions into Chitral, which continued for months.

The Kurram Front

In the last week of April 1919, when Amanullah deployed his army to the frontier in support of his declaration of independence, the center front in the greater Paktia was entrusted to General Mohammad Nader, the former commander in chief. His instructions included advancing into the Kurram and Waziristan tribal country to mobilize the tribesmen in *Jihad* against the British rule. The general, accompanied by his two brothers (Shah Mahmud and Shah Wali), moved ahead of the army to Gardez to organize the Afghan tribes in support of a major military campaign across the Durand Line into Kurram and Waziristan. British sources reported that Nader Khan was leading a force of 16 infantry battalions, two battalions of pioneers, four cavalry regiments, and 60 guns.[64] The numbers apparently included all Afghan forces based before the war in greater Paktia between Ghazni, Gardez, Khost, and other border areas. Only part of these formations took part in the military campaign under Nader Khan and his brothers. In fact, Nader Khan mostly depended on tribal *lashkars* supported by selected regular battalions and the artillery.[65]

From the time he arrived in Gardez on April 26, the Afghan general spent weeks gathering and organizing the tribes of greater Paktia, including the Jaji, Mangal, Zadran, Ahmadzai, Tota Khel, Wazir, and Mahsuds, and grouping them into tribal *lashkars* to operate on three main axes. Meanwhile, he sent emissaries to the chiefs of the Wazirs and other Pashtun tribes on the British side of the line asking them to join the Afghan army and *lashkars* in their anti-British struggle. One of the Wazir tribal chiefs, who was involved in organizing tribal Jirgas in Waziristan and Zhobe, later detailed the resolutions of the tribal Jirga: every second able-bodied man per household should join the *Jihad*; the tribal uprising must be universal to spread the enemy forces across the whole area; the war had to be fought as separate and numerous guerrilla attacks culminating in a general uprising; the tribes should not expect material support from Kabul but would

share in the spoils of war; enemy spies should be held until the end of war for final judgment by the tribal Jirga; and the tribal chiefs of Wazir, Kundar, Zhob, and Gomal would have the sole authority to lead their tribal operations.[66]

In order to spread the enemy forces across a broad front and cover all major routes through the entire central front, General Nader Khan planned to conduct a three-pronged offensive into the Kurram Valley and Waziristan tribal country. He appointed his brother, Sardar Shah Mahmud Khan, to lead an attack from the Jaji tribal area across the Piwar Kotal Pass into the Upper Kurram Valley to engage the British Kurram militia (recruited mostly from the Shi'a Turi Pashtun tribe). General Nader Khan dispatched his other brother, Sardar (later Marshal) Shah Wali Khan, with a tribal *lashkar* and regular troops to Orgun in the Gomal Valley to advance into South Waziristan and seize control of the British posts and capture Wana, the center of South Waziristan. General Nader Khan himself led the main attack from Khost along the Kaitu River into the northern edge of North Waziristan with Spinwam and Thal as his immediate objectives. Seizing these objectives would put the Afghan army in a position to threaten Peshawar from the south. In the middle of May 1919, the Afghan forces, organized to launch their multidirectional offensive, left Gardez for their respective sectors.[67]

On the eve of the Afghan troop advance from Khost (May 22), Major General Eustace, commanding the Kohat area and the line of communication, had about 10 infantry battalions, one cavalry regiment, two artillery batteries, and one machine gun battery under his command, which were deployed between Parachinar in Upper Kurram Valley and Kohat to the east. Of these troops, two infantry battalions, one squadron of cavalry, four mountain guns, and a company of sappers and miners were based at Thal while two infantry battalions, a cavalry squadron, and four mountain guns were deployed at Parachinar. Additionally, the

Kurram militia was deployed in security posts across the valley, with its headquarters in Parachinar. There was also one infantry battalion based between Thal and Kohat and three infantry battalions, two cavalry squadron, and an artillery battery in Kohat. The forces in the Upper Kurram, centered at Parachinar, were under the command of Brigadier General Fagan, while forces in the lower Kurram, centered in Thal, were under the direct command of Major General Eustace.

The Afghan movements on the central front eased the British pressure on Dakka and delayed the projected advance on Jalalabad. The British command may have favored a preemptive attack on Khost to forestall the Afghan drive, as they did on the southern front by attacking the Spin Boldak fort on the Kandahar border. But the lack of sufficient troops and transport at the time severely restricted British options for an attack on Khost. Therefore, reinforcing the security posts in the area was the only British option readily available. Expecting the Afghan attack from Piwar Kotal, Major General Eustace deployed a significant part of his troops into the Upper Kurram, weakening his forces at Thal. As the Piwar Kotal was the least likely axis of Nader Khan's attack, a more possible thrust of the Afghan army from Khost eastward to Thal could split the Eustace forces in two. Nader Khan's decision to deploy part of his forces for a supporting attack through the Piwar Kotal effectively tied up a significant number of British troops, facilitating the advance of the main attack from Khost to Thal. Here again, the British conspicuously ignored the time-tested principle of the economy of forces.

On May 22, General Nader Khan left Matun, the center of Khost, and advanced down the Kaitu River in a southeasterly direction, from where he could either proceed to Bannu in the east or swing northeast to Thal. The British command was not clear about the real intention of the Afghan general, but what they did see was growing restlessness among the

Wazir tribes, who showed signs of uprising in support of the Afghan cause. A series of tribal Jirgas over the previous two months resulted in the commitment of a large number of Wazir and Mahsud chiefs to the Afghan-instigated *Jihad* against the British. So when Nader Khan approached Spinwam, a military post in northern Waziristan, the garrison withdrew to the Tochi Valley while militia posts along the Tochi Valley west of Miranshah withdrew into that town. Withdrawing from the militia posts caused widespread desertion among the Waziristan militia and was followed by a general uprising of the tribes across the area that continued many months after the end of the Afghan war. General Nader Khan, leading a force of five to six regular battalions and large bodies of Afghan tribesmen from greater Paktia and an increasing number of Wazir fighters, occupied Spinwam on May 25.[68] There he was at an equal distance from Bannu and Thal. In order to respond to all contingencies, the British dispatched a security force from Bannu, four miles to the west, to watch the Afghan movement along the Kaitu Valley. At Thal, General Eustace reinforced the garrison by shifting two infantry battalions and a section of mountain battery from Kohat, increasing the level of the infantry troops there to four battalions.

Thal is situated at the confluence of three streams, with the Kurram River flowing from the northwest, the Sangroba stream coming from the northeast, and the Ishkalai Nala running parallel to the Sangroba some 1,800 yards to the south. The town sits in a plateau mostly surrounded by hills. The fort of Thal stands on a mile-wide plateau between the Sangroba and Ishkalai streams 100 feet above the Kurram River, which flows a mile to the west of the fort. Half a mile to the west is the large village of Thal, which was inhabited by some 2,000 Bangash Pashtuns. To the northwest, beyond the Sangroba stream rises the prominent peak of Khadimakh, 1,300 feet above the plateau. To the east the ground slopes gently upward for 20 miles, while in the south,

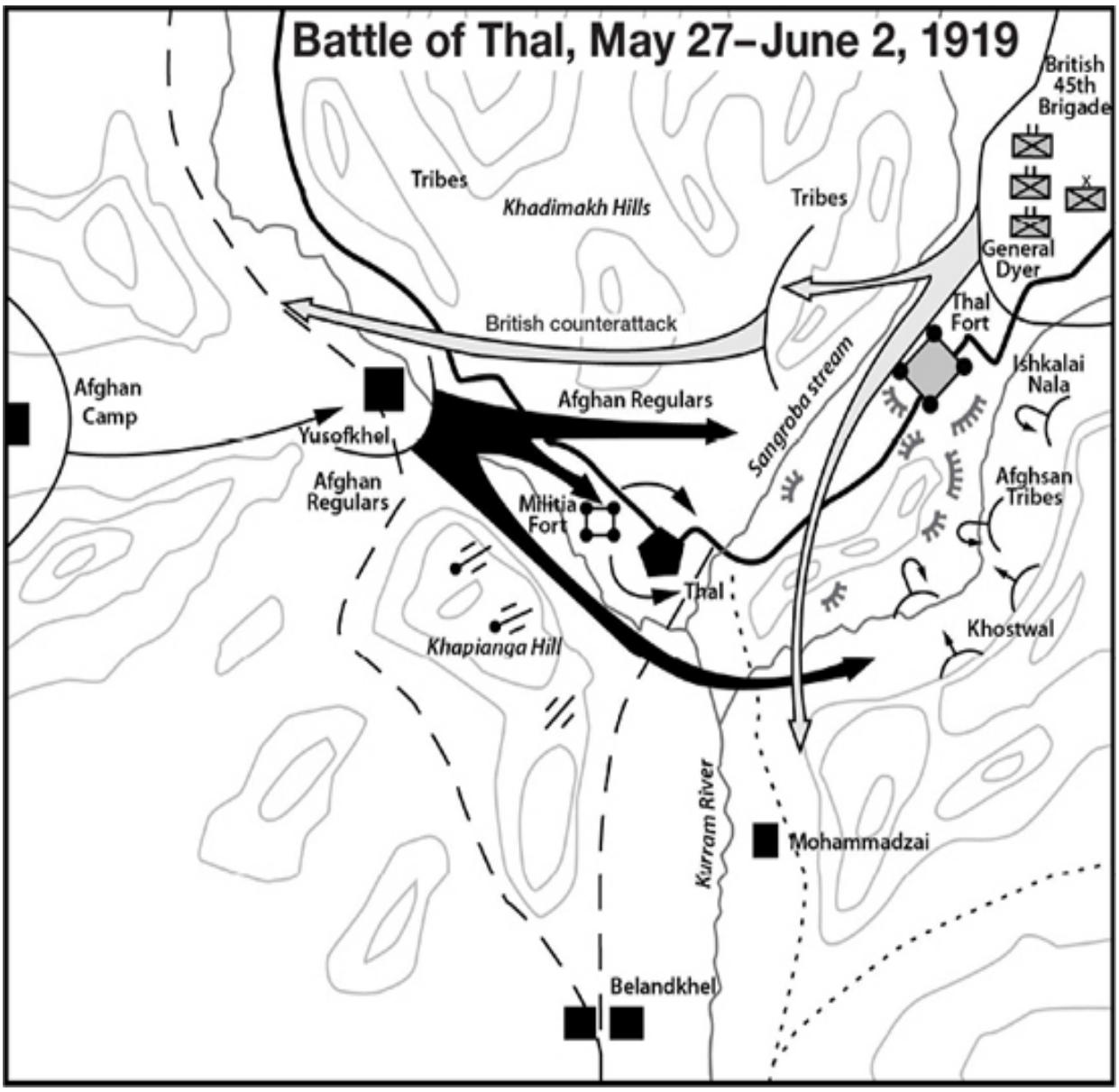
across the Ishkalai Nala, the town is flanked by a series of hills running east and west, which rise in height as they recede from Thal, culminating to the west in the peaks of the Kafir Kot mount. To the west of Thal, an isolated hill known as Khapianga rises 800 feet above the Kurram River. The Thal post supplied water from a well in the Sangroba stream, 300 yards northeast of the fort, where it was pumped up for the use of the troops and of the railway.

Taking personal command in Thal, General Eustace organized an all-round defense around the town and the Thal fort using two lines. An inner line covered the fort of Thal, the railway station, and the Civil Rest House. The outer line ringed the town at a distance of 1,200 yards with a five-mile-long perimeter. The inner line was held by one infantry battalion minus two companies, and the outer line was occupied by three infantry battalions minus one company. The reserve was three infantry companies. The lines were strengthened by work on the defenses all day on May 26.

After capturing Spinwam, General Nader Khan chose to move northeastward to Thal on the main road to Kohat and on to Peshawar in the north. The Afghan army under General Nader Khan numbered some 3,000 regulars with an equal number of tribesmen. It arrived in Thal at 9:00 AM on May 27. The Afghan general set up his headquarters at Yusuf Khel, three miles west of the fort. His artillery consisted of two 100 mm howitzers and seven 75 mm guns transported by elephants. These opened fire the same day from the Khapianga and at Black Rock (a small conical hill near Yusuf Khel) against the Thal fort at ranges of 3,500 and 5,500 yards respectively and caused significant damage to the parapet and to the buildings in the fort. Several shells burst in the barracks used as a hospital. Communication trenches were dug inside the fort, to keep down the number of casualties. The Thal village was occupied by the Afghan infantry, while the tribesmen crossed the Kurram River and

seized the hills overlooking Mohammadzai, 3,500 yards south of the fort, and also the lower spurs of Khadimakh.

On May 28, the fire of the 100 mm Afghan howitzers proved to be more effective and intense, setting fire to the petrol dump, the *bhoosa* (straw fodder) stacks outside the fort, and the rations in the railway station. The wireless station was hit and put out of action for a while. Outranged by the Afghan guns, the British artillery was unable to respond effectively. According to British accounts, this was the only occasion during the campaign when the British were "definitely inferior to the Afghans in artillery."[69] Two RAF planes made an attempt to bomb the Afghan gun positions, but their impact did not last long. Afghan regulars made an infantry assault from the Thal village against the fort at 10:30 AM on May 28. The attack failed due to the enemy's combined fire of artillery, Lewis guns and machine guns. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the Afghan artillery figured prominently during the whole action, boosting the morale of the tribesmen and weakening the will of the British-controlled militia.[70] That night (May 28–29), the Frontier Constabulary evacuated the militia post on the right bank of the Sangroba and fled toward Hangu, allowing the Afghans to occupy the post, which put them in a position to threaten the enemy's water supply. On May 29, the garrison began digging pits, which they lined with tarpaulins for storing water. Owing to the destruction of the ration dumps, food began to run short, and consequently the troops and animals were put on half rations.



The Battle of Thal, May 27–June 2, 1919.

On the night of May 29–30, the Afghan troops made another attempt to storm the enemy troops on the piquet hill, south of the fort. It was held by an infantry battalion. The attack was repulsed during close combat supported by the enemy mountain guns, machine gun fire, and a shower of hand grenades. On the following day (May 30), the Afghan 75 mm guns relocated onto the heights south of the fort and engaged the fort with steady fire all day, causing enormous

damage to the parapet and its gun emplacement. By then, the siege had significantly weakened the defenses of Thal. The garrison had lost 90 men and 100 animals in six days and suffered from a shortage of supplies. With the extension of the siege, more and more tribesmen were joining the anti-British revolt. It was not expected that Thal could withstand the Afghan attack unless it was rapidly reinforced.

The Afghan army may have missed another opportunity to win a major victory. In hindsight, General Nader Khan's failure to mount a major offensive using all available forces against a weakly held enemy position at the fort of Thal before it was reinforced was a squandered opportunity. Instead of passively sitting in the hills around Thal, watching the artillery bombardment of the enemy defenses, the Afghan army could have won big, had it immediately initiated the attack. Another opportunity open to the Afghan army was masking Thal with a smaller force and pushing forward to Kohat and launching an attack before it was reinforced. The Afghans also failed to take advantage of such a chance. The heterogeneous nature of the Afghan forces (a combination of regular troops and an assortment of different tribes), poor training, the lack of firm discipline, the uneven professional competence of the officer corps, and cautious leadership contributed to the omission.

The siege of Thal sent shock waves throughout the North West Frontier, forcing a stop to the preparations that were being made for an advance on Jalalabad. Instead, forces were shifted to the Kurram Valley to relieve Thal without delay; otherwise, the Orakazais and the Zaimakhts, who had not yet committed to the Afghan cause, would join the ranks of the Afghan invasion.

The British commander at Peshawar, General Arthur Barrett, ordered the transfer of the reinforcements intended for Dakka to the Kurram front. These forces were part of the 16th Division, which was in the process of moving up from Lahore. Its leading brigade, the 45th Infantry Brigade, was

under General Dyer, the controversial figure of the Amritsar massacre of April 13, 1919. Arriving at Peshawar, Dyer was ordered to march his brigade immediately to the relief of Thal, while the rest of the 16th Division was instructed to move to Kohat, which was practically undefended after Eustace had shifted most of its garrison to Thal. In order to overcome the transport problems, 62 heavy trucks were sent by road from Peshawar to Kohat.

Taking control of the existing forces at Hangu and four 15-pounder guns from the Kohat fort, on May 30 Dyer moved his troops by rail and road transport to Togh, 27 miles northeast of Thal. His force included four infantry battalions, 250 rifles from the 57th Rifles Frontier Force, one company from the 2–4th Border Regiment, one cavalry squadron, 12 guns, one armored car battery, and support elements. The column left Togh early on May 31 and, after covering 18 miles in the hot weather, rested at a camp ground nine miles short of Thal, where the brigade established visual communication (semaphore) with Thal from the Samana ridge. The following day (June 1), the brigade left camp at 5:00 AM after piquetting 250 riflemen from the 57th Rifles along the left flank across the Ishkalai Nala, which ran parallel to the road and railway. On reaching the fighting, the brigade occupied an assembly area two miles northeast of Thal. At this time, the Afghan forces were positioned as follows: A body of 2,000 tribesmen with a few regulars and four guns was holding the low spurs of Khadimakh peak, sloping down to Thal in the north. Some 4,000 tribesmen, under the influential chief Babrak Khan Zadran, occupied the heights to the south of the Ishkalai Nala, on the Wazir hills dominating Thal from the south. This body included the Pashtun tribes from Khost, known collectively as Khostwals, and the Wazirs from the British-controlled territory. Meanwhile, the main force of Afghan regulars, with the field howitzers, was deployed near Yusuf Khel and on Khapianga hill, on the west bank of the Kurram River, which was, at the time, between

two and three feet deep. To the north, the Orakzai and the Zaimakhts tribesmen were gathering, but they were watching the scene before joining the battle in case the Afghan army captured the fort of Thal.

After surveying the situation on the battlefield, General Dyer decided to attack the Afghan forces in two phases. In the first phase, he intended to attack and dislodge the tribesmen under Babrak Khan on the southern hills and then attack the Afghan regulars and tribes holding the Khadimakh slopes to the north of Thal. To give the impression that both positions were being attacked simultaneously, the artillery engaged targets on both positions as the attack was launched on the Wazirs and Khostwals holding the heights to the south. While two infantry battalions, supported by an artillery section and sappers and miners, moved forward to cover the advance to a position halfway between Thal and Abbasid Banda, two more infantry battalions assaulted and captured Hill 2657 overlooking Thal from the south. The combination of artillery fire and a surprise attack by British infantry forced the assortment of different tribes, with no cohesive organization, to break line and scatter in all directions by 4:00 PM. After leaving 200 rifles to hold the captured hill, the remaining battalions were withdrawn for the night to the main camp. Meanwhile, a section of horse artillery rushed forward to Thal, where it engaged and silenced the Afghan guns on the Khapianga hill to the west of the village.

On the following morning (June 2), General Dyer assumed command of all the troops in Thal, while General Eustace returned to Kohat. Then he initiated the second phase of his action by launching an attack with two battalions on the Afghan forces holding the lower slopes of Khadimakh ridge, northwest of Thal. The leading battalions were followed by two other battalions in support of the attacking troops. As the attack was developing, General Dyer received a letter from the Afghan commander, General Nader Khan, saying

that he had been ordered by the amir to suspend hostilities, and asking for an acknowledgment to his note. In a tone of hostile rebuke, General Dyer answered, “My guns will give an immediate reply, and a further reply will be sent by the Divisional Commander to whom the letter has been forwarded.”[71]

Instructed by the amir to cease hostility due to an armistice agreement with the British, Nader Khan began withdrawing his forces with all possible speed. The situation allowed the British troops to occupy the heights rapidly with little opposition. Meanwhile, on the right of the British column, the RAF planes bombed the Zaimukhts on the northern slopes of the Khadimakh hills. Severe heat and exhaustion prevented the infantry from continuing the advance. The armored cars and one cavalry squadron, however, moved up the western bank of the Kurram River to harass the retiring Afghan forces. Air reconnaissance discovered that the Afghan headquarters had been moved to the foothills, three miles west of its original location. On the following morning (June 3), a column of two cavalry troops, two guns, 60 rifles, and two armored cars was dispatched to Yusuf Khel.[72] The detachment reached the Afghan camp at 11:00 AM and found that it had been hastily abandoned with artillery ammunition and stores spread all over. The next day, when camels arrived to haul away the stores, they found that the camp had been already looted by the neighboring villages.

At the time that the Afghan main effort was focused on the Khost-Kohat axis, two supporting attacks on the flanks of the main offensive effectively tied up a significant number of the enemy troops and helped organize the frontier tribesmen in rising up against the British authorities. To the north, the Afghan forces under Sardar Shah Mahmud Khan made several incursions into Upper Kurram around Parachinar, keeping the British brigade heavily engaged in repelling and

containing the incursion of the Afghan regulars and tribesmen.

To the south, in anticipation of the Wazir and Mahsud uprisings in support of the Afghan advance in the Kurram Valley, the British-controlled militias were withdrawn from the Upper Tochi Valley, west of Miranshah, including Wana, the largest city of South Waziristan. This move encouraged desertions by the militiamen, who joined their Afghan kinsmen in the anti-British war.[73] The Afghan forces under Sardar Shah Wali Khan, in collaboration with the Wazir and Mahsud tribesmen, raided several posts in North and South Waziristan and captured Wana.

With the Nader Khan advance, isolated detachments of the North Waziristan militia and the regular troops in the Upper Tochi Valley quickly evacuated their posts and withdrew to within the administrative border. Those militiamen garrisoning Miranshah, however, mutinied, seizing weapons and ammunition from the fort, setting off several similar incidents by smaller detachments stationed in the Lower Tochi Valley. At Wana and in Gomal, Afridi and the Wazir officers and men in the South Waziristan militia followed suit, forcing their British officers and the remaining loyal *Sepoys* to withdraw under heavy attack out of the areas. They faced further desertions on route and, after suffering serious casualties, the survivors finally reached Mir Ali. The 1,100 deserters seized 1,190 rifles and over 700,000 rounds of ammunition from their posts, which were then used with deadly effect against imperial troops.[74] Emboldened by these events, the Mahsud tribesmen attacked isolated posts at Dardoni, Idak, and Jandola and raided the Derajat.

The Southern Front

On the Kandahar front, the Afghan army’s concept of operation was not different from the ones applied on the

other fronts in the north. It aimed at stirring up the Pashtun tribes on both sides of the Durand Line to join the Afghan army in its war of independence under the banner of *Jihad*. Among them, the Ghilzai tribes in Waze-khwa and Do-China (in today's Paktika Province) were being mobilized to invade Zhob, where the local tribes were sympathetic to the Afghan cause. Zhob, the hilly country located between Waziristan and Baluchistan, is bisected by a large valley running from the hills near Ziarat, first eastward and then northward until it meets the Gomal River at Khajuri Kach. The area, with its center at Appozai (207 miles northeast of Quetta),[75] constitutes the strategic line of communication between the British-era North West Frontier Province and Quetta. In May 1919, the district was lightly held by the British, and the Afghans considered it easy to invade across the porous border at Terwa and Do-China. For the British command to deal with the threat, it needed either to concentrate sufficient forces in Zhob or to forestall the Afghan move by initiating an invasion of Afghan territory. Another threat to the British forces in the south was a coordinated attack by Afghan regulars and the tribal *lashkars* along the main road to the border town of Chaman and on to Quetta and the Bolan Pass.

In May 1919, the Afghan regular forces based in Kandahar included five infantry battalions, one cavalry regiment, and 25 guns. There were also two infantry battalions and six guns at Qalat and one battalion and two machine guns in Muqur. In addition to these, the amir ordered Prime Minister Sardar Abdul Qodus Khan, toward the end of April 1919, to lead a 1,500-strong force from Kabul to Kandahar as part of the Afghan government's plan to support its declaration of independence with a show of military force. Obviously, that size of military buildup was hardly strong enough to invade the British-controlled territory in Baluchistan, where the enemy was much stronger in numbers and equipment. Further, it took Sardar Abdul Qodus Khan nearly a month to

arrive with his reinforcement at Kandahar on May 31—when the British forces in Baluchistan had already launched their invasion.

The British forces in Baluchistan included the 4th Infantry Division and the 12th Mounted Brigade. These included three cavalry regiments, 10 infantry battalions, one machine gun company, and three artillery batteries. There were also two infantry battalions, a cavalry regiment, an armored car battery, and a mountain artillery battery based in Zhob for garrison duties. With the commencement of war, all these forces were grouped into the Baluchistan force and put under the command of Lieutenant General Wapshare while Major General Woodyatt commanded the 4th Division, headquartered at Quetta. As the war continued on other fronts, General Wapshare was expected to take actions to discourage the tribes, particularly the Kakar, Mando Khel, and Sherannis of Zhob and the Achakzais that straddled the border at Chaman and Spin Boldak. The Afghans also made attempts to raise the Pashtun tribes in Baluchistan as well as the Bugti Baluch tribe east of Quetta and the Brahui south of Kalat. As the shortage of transport prohibited any extensive invasion of Afghanistan, a limited incursion into Afghan territory followed by a big win was urgently needed to impress the wavering tribes.

General Wapshare considered the reactive reinforcement of Zhob in the face of impending threats from the tribes as strategically unsound and instead decided to concentrate on fielding an overwhelming force to capture the Afghan border fort of Spin Boldak, known locally as Qala-i-Jadid (the new fortress). Spin Boldak is some six miles northwest of Chaman and guards the main road to Kandahar. Known as the second strongest fortress in Afghanistan, Spin Boldak was garrisoned by an Afghan battalion (500 men), armed with single-shot breech-loaded Martini-Henry rifles. It was commanded by Colonel Yusuf Shah Khan and his deputy, Major Daud Shah Khan. The British command believed that a spectacular show

of force while reducing Spin Boldak would not only exert a significant blow against the Afghans' morale but also frighten the Zhob tribes and disrupt any Afghan invasion. General Wapshare decided to capture this fortress with a surprise attack. For this purpose he concentrated two cavalry regiments, two infantry brigades with a total of seven infantry battalions, at least four artillery batteries, two machine gun companies, three companies of sappers and miners, and other support elements. With this force structure, the British outnumbered the Afghan battalion in Spin Boldak at a ratio of 10:1. The Afghans were outgunned at an even much higher quotient.

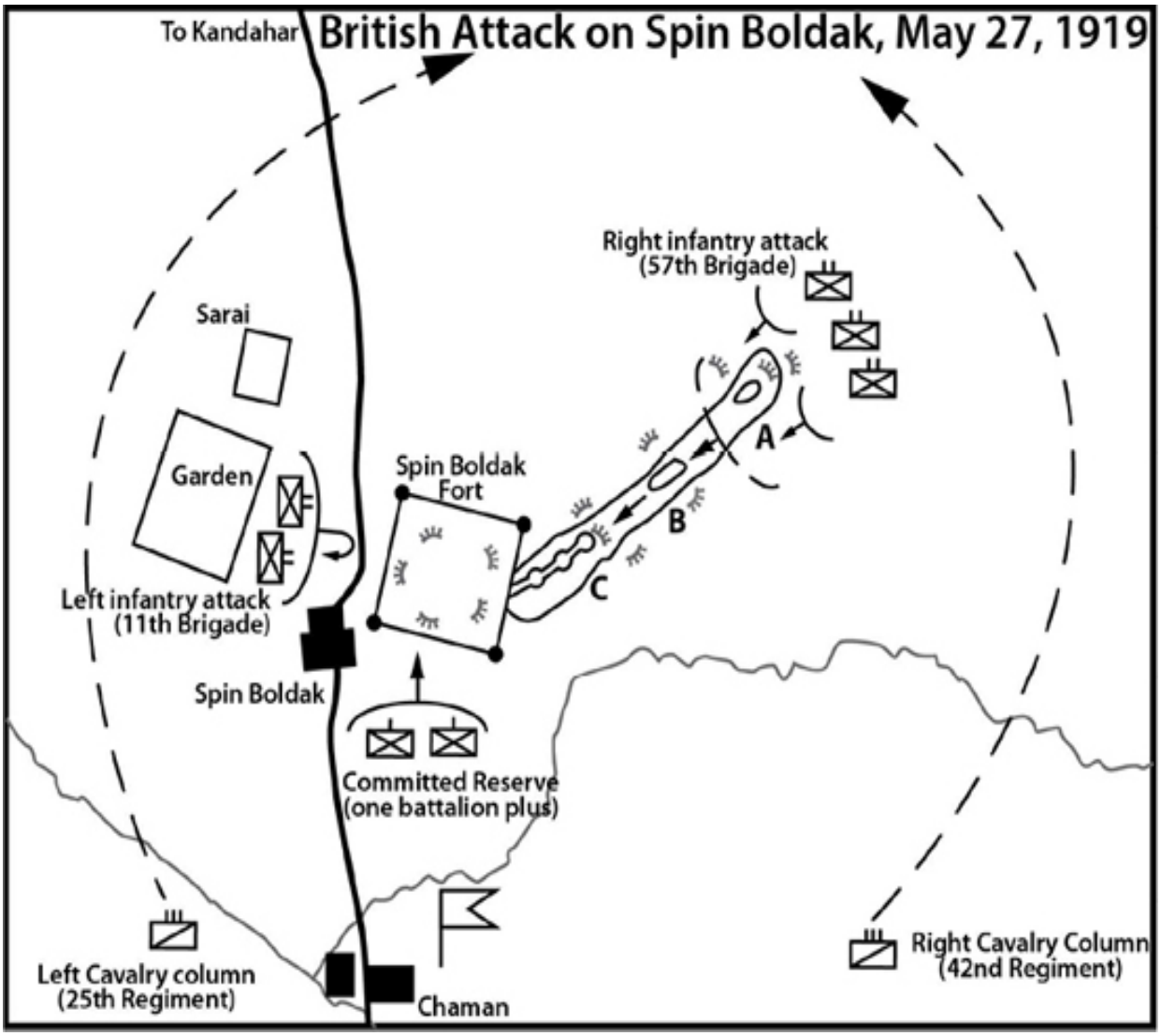
Spin Boldak is situated on the southwest bottom of a 600-yard-long ridge running from northeast to southwest. It rises 200 feet above the plain and features three knolls along its length. For reference purposes, British sources identified them as the A, B, and C hills. The A, which is on the northeast of the ridge, is the highest, and the C, on the southwest, is the lowest. From C, the ground slopes gently to the plain, where the fort was situated at the base of the ridge at the eastern side of the Chaman-Kandahar road. It was a square structure with an inner and outer wall surrounded by a moat, 25 feet deep and 25 feet wide and usually dry. The faces of the outer wall were 250 yards long and 25 to 30 feet high. There were bastions at each corner, and the center of each wall was provided with two tiers of loopholes. Between the outer and the inner walls, there was a clear space of 20 yards. Between the fort and the top of hill C, there were three towers, each with three tiers of loopholes. Each tower was encircled by a loopholed wall with a radius of 20 to 30 yards. Double walls connected the towers with the fort and with one another, thus providing a covered communication pathway for the garrison. On hill A and hill B, there were prepared gun platforms as well as trenches and breastworks erected for the defense of these features.

To the west of the ridge, on the western side of the main road, stood two walled enclosures, one of which was a garden 200 yards west of the fort and the other, 100 yards north of the garden, was a square-shaped *Sarai* (staging post) with bastions at each corner. There was another 200-square-yard garden south of the fort.

General Wapshare's plan was to cordon off the fort using two cavalry columns to the north, west, and east in order to prevent the garrison from escaping. Two infantry columns, supported by artillery, would converge on the objective from the northeast and southwest and then storm the ridge and the fort. The right cavalry column, consisting of the 42nd Cavalry Regiment and two machine guns under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Taylor, was to proceed to the northeast of Spin Boldak and deal with any of the garrison who attempted to escape through the north and east edge of the Spin Boldak ridge. The left cavalry column, comprising the 25th Cavalry Regiment (minus one squadron) and six machine guns, was to get into position west of Spin Boldak and to block the Afghans from slipping out from the west and north of the Spin Boldak fort and the ridge. Both columns were instructed not to carry on the pursuit further than four miles and not to become involved in village fighting.

The two attacking infantry columns were each formed from an infantry brigade. The right column, under Brigadier General Gordon, included the 57th Infantry Brigade, comprising two infantry battalions (1–4th Royal West Kent Regiment and 1–129th Baluchi Regiment), one section of the machine gun company, plus sappers and miners. The column was ordered to advance up the ridge from the northeast, and to capture the knolls and the towers and then be ready to assault the northern face of the fort. The left infantry column, under Major General Hardy, included the 11th Infantry Brigade, consisting of two infantry battalions (the 1–22nd Punjabis and the 1–4th Gurkha Rifles) and one section of the machine gun company, plus sappers and miners. This

column was to advance astride the Chaman–Spin Boldak–Kandahar road and, after giving the garrison the opportunity to surrender, to capture the gardens and buildings south and west of the fort. Then it was to be prepared to assault the west and south faces of the fort. The General Reserve, under Lieutenant Colonel Boutflower, had two infantry battalions (the 1st Battalion, the Duke of Wellington's Regiment, and the 2/10th Gurkha Rifles), one cavalry troop, two sections of machine guns, and a pioneer company, plus sappers and miners. The artillery consisted of a battery of 18-pounder guns and a battery of howitzers (two 4.5-inch and four 5.00-inch pieces). These were to deploy 3,000 yards south of the fort, with the 18-pounders supporting the attack of the 57th Brigade using creeping fire along the ridge while the howitzers kept the towers on the C hill and the fort itself under fire.



British Attack on Spin Boldak, May 27, 1919.

At 4:30 AM, on May 27, 1919, the two cavalry columns left camp and took up their assigned positions unopposed. They were followed by the infantry columns, the general reserve, and the artillery. The left infantry column (the 11th Brigade) reached its deployment line at 6:30 AM. It was west of the main road, facing the garden enclosure some 2,000 yards from the fort. Major General Hardy sent forward a white flag, calling on the garrison to surrender. The fort commander, Colonel Yusuf Shah Khan, who was known as a proud officer, responded to the message by opening fire at the

“audacious” messenger. One hour later, the right infantry column (the 57th Brigade) reached its deployment line, 2,000 yards northeast of hill A. It was ready to initiate the attack on the ridge. At 8:00 AM, the guns opened fire, and the right column infantry started to advance, with the Royal West Kent Regiment leading the attack on a frontage of one company, followed by the Baluchis. The progress was slow over the rough terrain, causing the infantry to fail to keep pace with the shifting artillery support fire. As the artillery barrage passed over hill A, the West Kents were 1,000 yards from it, and the fire had to be repeated. There was little opposition during the advance to within rifle range from hill A. But at 9:15 AM, as the leading infantry were 150 yards from the hill, a few resolute Afghan soldiers fought the enemy from the breastworks and held up their advance for two hours.

On the left, two battalions of the 11th Brigade advanced from two directions on the enclosures around the fort. To the south, the Gurkha Rifles advanced on the right of the main road and attacked the garden south of the fort. To the west, the Punjabis moved on the left of the road and attacked the southern wall of the garden, located west of the fort. Neither of the enclosures was occupied, but their capture moved the attacking troops to a position close enough to the fort walls for a final assault. While the Gurkha Rifles reached their objective (the garden) by 8:45 AM, the Punjabis found themselves held up by a wall 15 feet high and from two to three feet thick. It took them another hour to breach the southern and then the eastern walls of the garden in preparation for their attack on the fort. As the battalion was toiling in the garden, an RAF plane mistakenly bombed the troops, killing five and wounding eight men. Meanwhile, two platoons with a Lewis gun skirted the western face of the garden and occupied the *Sarai* to the north. This enabled the column to engage the fort by fire at a range of 200 yards

from both the gardens and the *Sarai*. At 9:50 AM, due to the intensity of fire and artillery bombardment, a number of defenders attempted to escape to the north but suffered many casualties.[76]

As noted earlier, the right column met heavy resistance on the ridge, and by 10:05 AM the leading battalion (the Royal Kents) had failed to make any progress. In order to lift the pressure off the column, General Wapshare ordered a battalion from the general reserve (the 1st Battalion, Duke of Wellington's Regiment) and one section of the machine gun company to make a frontal attack on the ridge from the south. The battalion reached the gardens at the foot of the hill, 500 yards east of the southeast bastion of the fort, at 11:15 AM. This coincided with the West Kents' capture of hill A. About a half-hour later, the Kents captured hill C following a ten-minute artillery barrage on the towers. A few tough Afghan fighters still resisted on hill B, holding up the Kents once again. A company of the Kents and a party of the Baluchis, who had come up on the right of the Kents, attacked the resisting Afghans from two sides, but they refused to surrender and were killed to a man.

By 1:00 PM, the artillery had breached the tower on hill C and the southern wall of the fort. The gate of the western wall was blown up with three rounds of a 5-inch howitzer, which was brought up to a position 200 yards from the gate. The fort was now vulnerable on all sides. As soon as hill C fell to the right column operating on the ridge, the left column rushed at the fort from the west and south. The Gurkha Rifles penetrated the southern face through a breach made by the artillery and through a drainage hole in the southwest corner of the wall. Once inside, they opened the gate for the Punjabis, who were scaling the walls with ladders. Both battalions then entered the enclosure. Parties of Afghans who were still in the fort remained defiant and opened fire on the attackers. They were attacked with hand grenades, and

most of them were killed. By 1:45 pm the fort was completely in British possession, and 169 Afghans, mostly wounded, including Colonel Yusuf Shah Khan and Major Daud Shah Khan, were taken prisoner and dispatched to Chaman. According to Afghan sources, except the wounded, who were taken by the British after the fall of Spin Boldak, almost all of the remaining men in the Afghan battalion fought to the death or were severely wounded and not found by the attackers.[77] As one British account put it, "It is impossible not to admire the courage with which they fought to the end without a thought of surrender."[78] Due to surprise, artillery and aerial bombardment, and the overwhelming numbers and firepower of a British division versus an Afghan battalion, the British losses were far lower. British sources put their numbers at 58, including 18 killed.

The British side saw the victory at Spin Boldak as big and spectacular with minimum losses. On the other side, the valiant fight to the death by an Afghan battalion fighting a well-armed and well-equipped British division marked the battle in Afghan history as the highest symbol of heroism and patriotism. The Afghan cemetery at Spin Boldak today is a shrine visited by pilgrims from all over the country. The battle of Spin Boldak or Qala-i-Jadid became the Alamo of Afghanistan,[79] and those who fell defending their home are eulogized in many folk songs. One of them says, "Qala-i-Jadid, the honorable site; it is the resting place of the martyrs blessed by the lights from heaven."[80]

The Spin Boldak fort and ridge were held by Brigadier General Gordon, commanding the 57th Infantry Brigade with a garrison of two infantry battalions, a squadron of cavalry, a section of machine guns, and two howitzers. The Battle of Spin Boldak was seen as a tragedy in Kandahar, but it inspired large numbers of volunteers to join the ranks of *Jihad*. According to eyewitness accounts, when the news reached Kandahar, the citizens turned madly emotional and

ready to fight. The Afghan reinforcements from Kabul, under Prime Minister Abdul Qodus Khan, arrived in Kandahar on May 31. Wearing a symbolic shroud showing his intention to avenge Spin Boldak, he led an army of one cavalry regiment, five infantry battalions, and some 9,000 tribesmen toward the border, reaching Mel Karez, 32 miles north of Chaman, two days later. This was the armistice day that the Afghan amir and the British viceroy in India agreed on, and any advance by the British forces was ruled out. But the ceasefire arrangement did not impress the Afghans, who continued scattered military actions. Abdul Qodus Khan occupied Murgha Chaman, five miles northeast of Spin Boldak, cutting off the garrison's water supply. The place was occupied by some 3,000 Afghan regulars and tribesmen, which forced a British cavalry force sent there on June 12 to withdraw. Meanwhile, an Afghan detachment was established on the Takht, six miles northwest of Spin Boldak. As on other fronts, the uneasy peace on the Kandahar front continued even beyond the peace agreement on August 8, 1919.

The Peace Agreement

The war was officially suspended on June 3, 1919, as a result of Amanullah's call for a cease-fire in a letter dated May 28 that reached the viceroy on May 31. The growing anti-British uprising of the Pashtun tribes in the British-controlled frontier and its wider implication for stability in northern India convinced the British authorities that the longer the hostilities continued, the larger the number of tribes that would support the Afghan cause would become. Meanwhile, the British advance into Afghan territory and the British ability to bomb targets deep inside Afghanistan induced Amanullah to seek an early end to the war. The amir's letter

of May 28 informed the viceroy that he had ordered his forces to cease fire for the peace talks to begin.

The viceroy seized the opportunity to end the war and, on June 2, wrote to Amanullah welcoming the proposal for an armistice, although he disputed the amir's claim that the war was initiated by the British. The viceroy agreed to stop the bombing if the amir pulled back his troops 20 miles from the British position, conducted a cease-fire on all fronts, and urged the tribes on both sides of the frontier to stop fighting. Amanullah, however, was adamant about his demand for British recognition of Afghanistan's full independence and was not ready to compromise on that issue. Replying to Chelmsford's terms, he wrote that the Afghan nation had repeatedly destroyed invaders of their homeland. But Amanullah accepted the British desire for peace and agreed to name a delegation for peace talks, which would be ready to travel on June 27.[81] Meanwhile, the Afghan commanders of the Chitral, Kurram, and Baluchistan fronts did not withdraw as demanded by the British as a condition for the armistice, and they did not stop inciting the tribes against the British.

In London, the amir's call for cease-fire was interpreted as a sign of his weakness, and the mood in England shifted to dealing with the Afghans as the defeated side and to making peace with the amir on British terms. But the viceroy, who saw the ground realities in a more objective way, believed that Amanullah would never cease his demands for full independence and that the alternative would be a resumption of the war that could have far-wider consequences for British rule in India. Amanullah named his interior minister, Ali Ahmad, to head the Afghan delegation at the peace conference in Rawalpindi, which opened on July 26, 1919. The British government was represented by Sir Hamilton Grant, previous foreign secretary of India and the designated successor to Roos-Keppel, who was deliberately excluded because of his anti-Afghan views. The peace

negotiations were tough but eventually turned into a give-and-take session. The five-article Treaty of Peace between the Illustrious British Government and the Independent Afghan Government was signed on August 8, 1919. It announced that “from the date of signing the treaty there shall be peace between the British and the Afghan governments.” It also declared that the British government “withdraws the privileges enjoyed by former Amirs of importing arms and ammunition through India to Afghanistan and confiscates the arrears of the late Amir’s subsidy with no subsidy granted to the present Amir.” The final article stated “the Afghan Government accepts the Indo-Afghan Frontier accepted by the late Amir. They further agree to the early demarcation by a British Commission of the un-demarcated portion of the line west of the Khyber where the recent Afghan aggression took place and to accept such boundary as the British Commission may lay down.”[82] In a separate letter submitted by the British head of the delegation to the Afghan side, it acknowledged that “the said treaty and this letter leaves Afghanistan officially free and independent in its internal and external affairs. Moreover this war has cancelled all pre-war treaties.”

The Tribal Fallout

In spite of the official end of hostilities on June 3, 1919, after both sides agreed to a cease-fire and the initiation of peace talks, the unrest in the tribal areas stirred up by the Afghan government continued and even spread. During the summer of 1919, there was a general tribal uprising between the Kabul River to the north and the Chaman village in the south (in Baluchistan) that posed a far more serious threat than the Afghan army. Even after the signing of the peace treaty on August 8, 1919, independent tribes, incited by Afghan officials, raided the area on an unprecedented scale. Afridi

attacks in the Khyber Pass and across the border into the Peshawar and Kohat districts increased during the autumn. On July 17, 1919, the Khyber Pass was closed when 10,000 tribesmen gathered in the Bazar Valley and attacked piquets between Bagiari and Ali Masjid. British punitive operations were restricted due to serious fighting in Derajat and Waziristan. Until a political settlement was arranged the following year, British troops and local militias were involved in intercepting raiders in the Peshawar and Kohat districts and blockading tribal territory. Further south, the Mahsud and Wazir tribes, emboldened by the British withdrawal of the militias, found a common unity in challenging British rule. Well armed with looted rifles and ammunition, and with their ranks swollen by militia deserters, they embarked on a bitter campaign of resistance to authority, which, with a few short respites, was to continue virtually up to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.[83]

Major General Climo, who commanded the 2nd Brigade during the fighting at Dakka, summarized the cumulative effect of improvements in tribal armament and tactics on the conduct of mountain warfare in an assessment on January 6, 1920:

> I am of opinion that the days of lightning frontier campaign, except against insignificant tribes, are over. Such campaigns must be more deliberate, will entail more troops for the defence of the communications, will require more transport and will be more expensive in lives, but the results to be obtained will probably be better and more lasting as we will take heavier toll of the enemy and will sensibly reduce his stock of fighting men.[84]

The Outcome and Lessons Learned

Afghanistan marked the signing of the Rawalpindi Treaty of August 8, 1919, as its official day of independence. Afghanistan has never been colonized by the British. There was no British presence in the country except during short-lived and failed British military occupations. And yet, the

British control of Afghanistan's external affairs, imposed following the second Anglo-Afghan war (1878–1880), was seen as a matter of national dependence and a cause of fighting for its removal. Afghanistan achieved its goal of full independence from British control following a short frontier war. The British concurrence with Amanullah's demand for lifting its control on Afghanistan's foreign affairs, however, was inspired more out of fear of the consequences of refusal than out of being forced to agree. The uprising of the frontier tribes caused by Amanullah's undeclared war and its possible fallout into wider areas in India, where the British already faced internal security challenges, constituted a much stronger reason for the British government to let Afghanistan go free. It was not the threat of the Afghan army, which was driven out of British-controlled territory and was unable to prevent limited British incursions inside Afghanistan.

In hindsight, it is an open question whether the Afghan amir would have attained his aim merely by exploiting the post–Great War situation in India and conducting agitation among the tribes without going to war. Amanullah himself claimed that his sending troops to the border was aimed at preventing the troubles in India from spreading into Afghanistan. But if the amir really intended for a military showdown, he had poorly planned, ineptly coordinated, and very badly led the military operations. The action on different fronts did not commence in a coordinated manner, allowing the British army to deal with each axis individually. The initiation of military operations on the Khyber and Kurram fronts came some three weeks apart. On the Kandahar front, the army reached Kandahar even later, after leaving a single, isolated Afghan battalion on the border to fight heroically to the death in the face of a British force 10 times stronger. The strategic concept for war, based on exploiting the internal British troubles in India and stirring up the frontier Pashtun tribes against the British authority, was a

brilliant idea, but the military planning and operations to support it were sloppy, unrealistic, and poorly executed, causing an unnecessary loss of lives and undermining the Afghan army's military prestige.

Although the third Anglo-Afghan war lasted about one month, the military forces involved directly and indirectly surpassed those of the two previous Anglo-Afghan wars (1839–1842 and 1878–1880), which each took more than two years. In spite of the fact that no major battles were fought with forces larger than a division, far greater forces were mobilized in support of military operations. On the Afghan side, tens of thousands of tribesmen joined about 60 infantry battalions and 15 cavalry regiments on five fronts of the war. The British deployed nearly 350,000 troops and 158,000 animals, an equivalent of about eight divisions with another two divisions in reserve. The cost of the war for India was estimated at seven million pounds sterling. The British human losses included 236 killed in action, 1,516 wounded or who died of disease,[85] and nearly 57,000 sick, with 1,000 deaths mainly from cholera. British estimates of the Afghan battle casualties stand at 600 killed and 1,000 wounded. The Afghan and tribal losses are roughly estimated to be double those of the British.[86]

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8 Afghanistan under King Amanullah and the Civil War

1919–1929

Amanullah emerged from the third Anglo-Afghan war a national hero and the most respected leader in the recent history of Afghanistan. He secured the full independence of Afghanistan at the time that the British Empire was still a global power with colonies around the world. He assumed the title of king (*shah*) and immediately moved to get his country out of international isolation by establishing diplomatic relations with major European powers, including Britain and the Soviet Union, as well as with the countries in the region. He received foreign envoys in Kabul and sent his embassies to other capitals. Using his influence, based on his early popularity within Afghanistan, King Amanullah introduced fundamental modernization programs through institutional reforms in governance, social, and economic affairs.

One of the major challenges faced by Afghanistan under Amanullah was the dwindling state revenue. The cost of war with the British had greatly depleted the reserve, estimated at about 15 crores (150 million) rupees collected by Amir Habibullah in the Kabul treasury. The arrears of British

subsidy due to the late amir at the time of his death, amounting to 44 lakhs (4.5 million) rupees, had been forfeited as a result of the peace agreement. This caused the pay of the army to be mostly in arrears. Responding to the situation, King Amanullah launched a wide-ranging austerity program that harshly affected many. This included cutting his personal and household expenses as well as reducing or entirely stopping government allowances to members of the Mohammadzai clan. The crown lands (*zamin-e Sultani*) in various provinces were put under control. Orders were issued for the immediate collection of all arrears of revenue that were five years overdue in Khost, and fines were levied from officials in case the full amount was not forthcoming. Refunds were issued of all advances given to traders and merchants by Amir Habibullah. But after the order evoked a storm of protests, it was subsequently modified to admit repayment by installments. Wealthy men were invited and practically forced to contribute large sums to the state treasury. Further, the government bureaucracy was downsized to save money while import and export duties were collected in cash on the spot. The export of all gold and silver was strictly prohibited and orders were given for the revenue to be collected entirely in cash instead of partly in kind.[1]

The Afghan government also initiated the issuing of paper money for the first time in the country. It issued currency notes for one crore (10 million) rupees in various denominations. The Afghan currency, however, did not escape sharp devaluation as in January 1920 the exchange rate of the Kabuli rupee dropped to 81 Kabuli rupees in exchange to one Indian rupee.[2] Meanwhile, as part of military reform, Amanullah issued orders in August 1919 to demobilize all tribal levies and gradually disband extra formations and new regiments formed during the war and various cadet corps, including the Sarios, Shahi, Rikabi, Mir

Aspor, and Khan Aspor, formed during Amir Habibullah's reign. Members of these formations were drafted into regular units.

King Amanullah had intended to remodel his army and hired the services of a Turkish military mission headed by Jamal Pasha, who had fought in Egypt and Palestine during the Great War (1914–1918). Jamal Pasha arrived in 1920 in Kabul. The Turkish mission worked out an elaborate reorganization plan, but Jamal Pasha met several obstacles in its implementation. His hidden agenda was to stir up troubles for the British in the Northwest Frontier. This produced visible results and created resistance to his military reform. The commander in chief, General Nader Khan, and Mahmud Sami, an Arab advisor who was commander of the military college (Harbia) were among the obstacles in Jamal Pasha's way.[3] Further, Afghan officers disliked being commanded by Turkish instructors. Others were jealous of their influence and the extra work they were required to do under the reorganization and training schemes. Jamal Pasha raised and trained a model formation (*qeta-i-namoona*) as a prototype for professional military units. This formation was the equivalent of a combined infantry battalion and a cavalry regiment. This was the unit in which Habibullah Kalakani served before leading the rebellion that overthrew Amanullah. The unit was later disbanded after Jamal Pasha lost hope in remodeling the Afghan military and left the country in 1921. However, the organization of the army he had designed remained for another seventy years. They included *Qol-i-Urdu* (army corps), *Firqa* (division), *Lewa* (brigade), *Ghond* (regiment), *Kandak* (battalion), *Tolay* (company), *Bolook* (platoon), and *Delgay* (squad).

Up to that time there were no military formations in the country higher than regiments. A nominal division in Kabul comprising four mixed brigades was the only contingent

with elements higher than regiments. These brigades each consisted of three infantry battalions, a field artillery battery and a pack artillery battery, a machine gun battery, and a cavalry regiment.

The remodeled army was organized in corps that consisted of two divisions each of two brigades. Further the cavalry regiments were detached from the brigades to form a cavalry corps of two divisions each comprising two brigades each of two regiments. It was also envisaged to group the artillery in a similar formation. Initially three corps were established with the 1st Corps in Kabul, the 2nd Corps in the eastern province of Nangrahar, and the 3rd Corps in the southern province of Kandahar.[4] Amanullah made strenuous efforts to renew the armaments of the army and provide it with rifles, machine guns, artillery pieces, and ammunition purchased from different countries. The main items provided in 1925–1926 included 200 Colt machine guns with eight million rounds, 44,000 rifles with over 24 million rounds, and 2,528 Lewis gun magazines.[5] The inventory also contained an assortment of armored vehicles, artillery pieces, and aircraft.[6] The assortment, however, entailed standardization and coordination problems, particularly as some items were purchased for their cheap price but were of low quality.[7] The high cost of maintaining a modern army, which was not affordable, prompted Amanullah to downsize the army and rely, when needed, on a national levy with limited training. During the Khost rebellion in 1924, King Amanullah raised 20,000 tribal levies since the unpopular army recruiting system (*hasht nafari*) had failed. Beginning in 1926, new efforts were made to reorganize the army and build a well-trained strike force. Fifteen Afghan officers were sent to Turkey and 40 more in 1927 for military training, while nine were sent to Moscow. In 1927 and 1929, two Turkish military missions coached and trained Afghan military units with visible improvements,

but the outbreak of rebellions interrupted military development. The army as a whole took little part in quelling the rebellion of 1928–1929, as many troops defected to the rebels. By November 1928, the army ceased to exist as a cohesive institution.

The new Afghanistan and its young king, however, faced a changing world order that was brought about by the First World War (1914–1918). The United States emerged as a world power, while Great Britain, a major victor in the war, inadvertently lost the war for global hegemony. Europe was no longer the center of world power, as winners and losers alike were destitute when the war ended. Militarily, the growth of American and Japanese naval power ended British naval supremacy—dropping it to a position of parity with the US Navy—and the rise of independence movements in India and Ireland caused a major reassessment of British imperial policy. Meanwhile, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia and the establishment of the Soviet Union, driven by its rigid ideological motives, were going to divide the world across ideological fault lines. The détente between Afghanistan's imperial neighbors over their influence in the region was going to shatter, and the Russo-British game plan in Afghanistan was taking a different shape. The Soviet Union was not Amanullah's grandfather's Russia. Inspired by the euphoria of independence, Amanullah quickly warmed up to Soviet Russia as part of a plan to balance off the great powers through active engagement. The Afghan relationship with the Soviets, however, was seen as a new challenge by British India since the Soviet rulers soon became active in winning influence in Afghanistan, Persia, and Turkey to "break the cordon of the Capitalist Phalanx." In the first two years of his rule, King Amanullah's foreign relations were very much dominated by negotiating political treaties with Soviet Russia and Great Britain.

Formal diplomatic relations between Afghanistan and Soviet Russia began in June 1919 and expanded rapidly before they ran into glitches over regional issues. An Afghan mission headed by Mohammad Wali Khan Darwazi was warmly welcomed in Tashkent and Moscow, and well-wishing letters were exchanged between Amanullah and Lenin. The Soviet ambassador Z. Spritz arrived in Kabul in January 1920 and set out to negotiate the elements of a treaty between the two states. The treaty, which was ratified in August 1921, bound both countries not to enter any military or political agreement with a third state "which might prejudice one of the Contracting Parties." The Soviets offered to permit free and tax-free transit of Afghan goods, opening the way for the transfer of arms and other military hardware through the Soviet space to Afghanistan. The pact also recognized the independence of Khiva and Bukhara "in accordance of the wishes of the people." The treaty pledged to provide Afghanistan with technical aid and financial aid of one million rubles in gold or silver and a return of the frontier districts that belonged to Afghanistan in the last century—a reference to Panjdeh on the Amu Darya River. The treaty provided for the opening of seven Afghan consulates on Russian territory, including five in Russian Central Asia, and for Russian consulates in Herat, Maimana, Mazar-i-Sharif, Kandahar, and Ghazni. But owing to the British refusal to conclude any kind of treaty with Afghanistan, if Russian consulates were permitted in Ghazni and Kandahar, the clause of the Russo-Afghan treaty regarding consulates was never fully implemented.[8]

The Soviet invasion of the khanate of Khiva and the emirate of Bukhara, under the pretext of respecting "the wishes of the people" represented by the Soviet surrogates, produced a major revision of Afghanistan's views of Soviet Russia. Amanullah wished Khiva and Bukhara to remain free and associated with Afghanistan and thus supported the

independence of his Central Asian neighbors. The Soviet expansion led to increasing differences between Kabul and Moscow. Afghanistan sympathized with the anti-Soviet insurgency in Bukhara, known as the Basmachi movement, and secretly sent men and ammunition to the insurgents. The Afghan general Mohammad Nader Khan directed this operation from Qataghan (northeastern provinces) on the Afghan-Russian border. Further, King Amanullah also unsuccessfully urged Britain to aid Bukhara.

A crucial test of relationships occurred on August 5, 1922, when Enver Pasha,[9] the leader of the Basmachis, was ambushed and slain after being surrounded by Russian cavalry at a village near Dushanbe. Amanullah shared Enver's dreams of a union of Muslim people in Central Asia. The incident caused Amanullah's "disillusionment with the Bolsheviks whose revolution he had heralded, as many had done, as a new dawn of liberation."[10] The Soviets used the Afghan's interference in Bukhara, and their failure to allow Russian consulates in southern Afghanistan (Ghazni and Kandahar), as the excuse for not ceding Panjdeh and not delivering all the aid they had promised under the treaty. King Amanullah's bitterness toward Moscow was reflected in Kabul's poor treatment of the Soviet mission and in his imposing restrictions on the activities of the Soviet agents.

A more serious crisis in Soviet-Afghan relations took place in December 1925, when Soviet troops occupied the Afghan Amu Darya island of Darqad, also known as Urta Tugai, where refugees from Soviet Central Asia had settled and which the Basmachis used as the staging area for raids into Soviet Central Asia. It took the Soviet authorities more than a year, despite Afghan and international pressure, to evacuate their troops from Darqad on February 28, 1926. Stalin made the decision to transfer Darqad (Urta-Tugai) to Afghanistan and remove the Soviet troops from there since "the loss of one island would not diminish the might of the

Soviet Union whereas the political advantage could be significant." As the Soviets proposed that the Afghans cease supporting the Basmachi in return for their island, "the Kremlin intended to turn a diplomatic defeat into a strategic success."[11]

The normalization of Afghanistan's relations with the British was attained by a treaty signed on November 22, 1921, after arduous negotiations that lasted 11 months and were conducted in four phases.[12] In the first phase (January to April 1921), the Afghan king unsuccessfully demanded territorial concessions in the North West Frontier (NWF) tribal area, and the British demanded the exclusion of Soviet consulate offices from southern Afghanistan (Ghazni and Kandahar). In the second phase (April to July 1921), Britain asked Afghanistan to break off its newly established diplomatic relations with Russia in exchange for a four-million-rupee subsidy and weapons, along with a pledge for assistance in the case of an unprovoked Russian invasion. In the third phase (July to September 1921), Afghanistan rejected a proposed defensive alliance with Britain on the grounds that its already ratified treaty with Russia precluded Afghanistan from making political and military agreements with a third party that may be detrimental to the contracting parties. The final phase (September to November 1921) concluded with the signing of the Treaty of Kabul. The 14-article pact stipulated that both governments respect each party's rights of internal and external independence. Afghanistan reaffirmed its acceptance of the Indo-Afghan frontier as demarcated by the various commissions from 1893 onward except for a slight adjustment west of the Khyber, which gave Afghanistan a barren spot known as Torkham. The treaty also called for opening British consulates at Kandahar and Jalalabad and the appointment of an Afghan consul general to Simla/Delhi and for opening consulates in Calcutta, Karachi, and Bombay. Afghanistan

was allowed to import machinery, arms, and ammunition through India as long as it maintained friendly ties with the British. The two governments agreed to inform each other of any military action they proposed to take against the tribes on their borders.[13]

In spite of the treaties with the Soviet Union and Great Britain, Afghanistan's relationship with its two powerful neighbors has never been easy, as each attempted to gain the favor of Afghanistan and foil attempts by the other power to gain influence in the region. Afghanistan made attempts to handle the Bolsheviks judiciously and to use the tribal card in relations with British India to gain increasing influence over its ties with Britain. The establishment of the republics of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan at the end of 1924 and their admission into the Soviet Union, along with intensive Soviet propaganda in northern Afghanistan, were followed by a policy of intensive Soviet penetration into Afghanistan during 1924–1925. It culminated with the Soviet occupation of Darqad Island on the Afghan border and increased Afghan apprehension about Russian aggression. When the Soviet encroachment was finally resolved in 1926, the Soviet government and Afghanistan signed the Pact of Neutrality and Non-Aggression in August 1926. The Afghan government saw the pact as a guarantee of protection of its northern provinces against potential Soviet aggression. The assistance the Soviets rendered under the treaty up to the end of 1927 included the supply of 11 aircraft, 15,000 rifles, and 15 million rounds of ammunition; the construction of a telegraph line between Kushk-Herat-Kandahar and Kabul; the training of 20 Afghan aviators in Tashkent; the supply of 24 Russian pilots and mechanics for the Afghan air force; and a survey of a road between Kabul and Patti Kesar through the Slang Pass.[14] The Urta-Tugai incident alerted the Afghan government to the danger of Soviet aggression in northern Afghanistan and

induced Kabul to further balance its relations with other powers, including Britain. By the mid-1920s, the expansion of Afghanistan's diplomatic reach to other major global actors removed its need to maintain a special relationship with the Soviet Union.

The Anglo-Afghan relations met new tensions as a result of the Afghans' use of frontier tribes as an instrument of policy toward British India—combined with Afghan efforts to feed British animosity toward the Bolsheviks in order to gain more concessions from Britain. The situation strained bilateral relations in 1923, as both sides resorted to using tribal surrogates to pressure each other. The situation improved in 1924 and 1925, although the use of the tribal card remained a main factor in Afghanistan's security policy. The country never gave up its claim of owning the fellow Pashtun tribes being divided by war-imposed boundary lines.

These incidents came at a very unstable geopolitical period in the region. Afghanistan was infested by a web of foreign intelligence operatives and plots supported by the winners and losers of the Great War and the postwar emerging powers to secure their geopolitical interests. The Afghan government's management of its foreign relations became complicated by King Amanullah's domestic policies of rapid modernization and radical social changes in the absence of the sufficient military and economic capacity of the state. His rule was marked by dramatic political and social change. He was the first Afghan ruler who attempted to modernize Afghanistan along Western lines, which offended many of his more conservative subjects. Among the most offensive changes seen by the public were those that guaranteed the rights of women and deprived husbands and fathers of power over their female dependents. Amanullah created new cosmopolitan schools for both boys and girls in the region and overturned

centuries-old traditions such as a strict dress code for women. In order to assist in these reforms, considerable numbers of foreigners were employed by the Afghan government as engineers, doctors, schoolmasters, and other professionals. The king institutionalized the reforms in the *Nizamnama*, or Fundamental Code of Laws, of Afghanistan enacted in March 1923, part of which were seen by many as in variance with the principles of Sharia. He also advanced a modernist constitution with the guidance of his father-in-law and foreign minister, Mahmud Tarzi, which incorporated equal rights and individual freedoms. His wife, Queen Soraya, played a huge role in regard to his policy toward women.

Further, the continuation of the partial draft system (*hasht nafari*), whereby one man in eight was called to serve in the army, was becoming extremely unpopular. The recruitment was made on the basis of quotas proportional to the population of a district or a tribal area. Public discontent intensified in the 1920s when King Amanullah tried to firmly and universally enforce the *hasht nafari.* The move caused tribal unrest.[15]

The rapid modernization through the secularization of the state created a backlash and a reactionary uprising in 1924, known as the Khost rebellion. The revolt was led by a local mullah, Abdullah, known as the Lame Mullah (*Mullah-i-Lang*), who mobilized the Mangals and some other tribes including Ahmadzai and Suleiman Khel. In order to instigate the people to rise, the mullah held the *Nizamnama* in one hand and the Koran in the other, asking the people to make their choice. Their choice was against the *Nizamnama* and their sovereign. The rebellion was also fueled by certain chiefs who had lost their privileges and certain frontier tribes who blamed Amanullah for failing to help them when they were suffering under the harsh punishments of the British following the war in 1919 because they sided with

the Afghan government in the Anglo-Afghan war. Even the war minister, General Nader Khan, refused to lead the army against the rebels unless certain concessions were granted to the tribes. The king rejected these demands, but he adopted a set of countermeasures, including efforts to address the grievances of the rebels through mediation by religious figures, convening a *Jirga* that approved changes in the *Nizamnama* to appease the protesters, and sending the army against the rebels. The rebellion was quelled by the force of these measures, and the insurgent leaders were arrested and executed. The tactical retreat and introduction of measures of government effectiveness brought temporary calm before the explosion of much wider rebellion.

King Amanullah traveled to Europe in late 1927 and, with his queen, visited the top leaders of Germany, Italy, the Vatican, France, and Belgium. Next, he traveled to Great Britain as guests of King George V and Queen Mary. On returning to his own country, Amanullah once more attempted to Westernize his reluctant subjects. European styles of dress were introduced and made compulsory for ministers and officials. Queen Soraya dramatically tore off her veil at a public gathering of notables. Amanullah proposed the introduction of monogamy, compulsory education for both sexes, the secularization of the law, and other radical reforms. By the closing months of 1928, resentment against the king and his plans had spread throughout all classes and regions. An armed insurrection broke out in November 1928. Amanullah’s unpopular reforms alienated even his close supporters and associates and stirred the clergy and opportunists to join the public opposition to the shah.

An uprising in Nangrahar rapidly expanded, and the rebels marched on the capital, where much of the army deserted rather than resist. Another religious leader in Tagao and

some other clerics north of Kabul persuaded Habibullah, the leader of a gang of highwaymen, to rise against the king. Commonly known as *Bacha-i-Saqao* (the son of a water carrier), Habibullah was a former soldier from Kalakan, north of the capital, who had a checkered past. He exploited the deteriorating security in the country and soon gathered a large following under the slogan of “saving Islam from the heretic policies of Amanullah.” He led an army, mostly of his Kohistani adherents, in an attack on Kabul. He was repulsed in his first attempt and was slightly injured. But the failure of the government to pursue the retreating rebels after new reinforcements had reached the capital enabled Habibullah to renew his attack on January 13, 1929. He fought government troops in the northern suburbs of Kabul.

As the situation became untenable in Kabul, King Amanullah abdicated on the following day in favor of his elder brother, Inayatullah, and retired to Kandahar. The new king held on for only three days and was then himself flown out to Peshawar by the RAF before the rebels closed in. Habibullah, the *Bach-i-Saqao*, then captured Kabul and proclaimed himself the amir. The Tajik “usurper” lacked the support of the Pashtun tribes and those who were opposed to his reactionary policies. His resources were limited, and the money with which he won some temporary support soon ran out. The situation caused a remarkable outburst of feeling in favor of the Afghan royal family among the tribesmen on both sides of the Durand Line. In a proclamation on January 26, 1929, Habibullah Kalakani announced the abolition of conscription, the cancelation of arrears of taxes and of new impositions, and the closing of the schools started by Amanullah. Habibullah’s position was by no means secure as he ordered that 4,000 soldiers be voluntarily enlisted while he could hardly pay them for any length of time. Initially Habibullah was supported only by his Kohistani allies and the mullahs of Tagao and Kabul. In

Nangrahar, the former interior minister Shahghassi Ali Ahmad Jan proclaimed himself the amir. After a brief acceptance, he lost the support of the tribes, and the province was plunged into chaos; Jalalabad was looted by the mobs and the tribesmen. The Shahghassi fled to Peshawar, from where he moved to Kandahar to rejoin King Amanullah, only to make another failed attempt to claim the throne after Amanullah left the country.

In Kandahar, Amanullah was accorded a new pledge of loyalty, and he rescinded his abdication and made another attempt to regain his throne. In April 1929 he left Kandahar with 3,000 troops and 7,000 tribesmen and followers. But it is a long way to the capital, and the Ghilzais living between Qalat and Ghazni were opposed to the king partly for his progressive policies and partly for the residual Durrani-Ghilzai rivalry. In Shahjui, the Wazir tribe settlers joined the Kandahar army and the Hazaras offered support to the king and fought for him, although they were outnumbered by the Ghilzai Pashtuns. Nevertheless, the Hazaras secured the road at Muqur, facilitating the passage of the royal army to Ghazni. Once it reached and occupied Ghazni, the Kandahar army faced increasing resistance. Amanullah's army was commanded by the interior minister, Abdul Ahad Wardak, who allegedly was not fully dedicated to the mission. Further in Ghazni, the Kandahar army came under pressure from three sides: the *Saqawi* army of Kabul, the Ghilzai tribesmen, and a new front of Suleiman Khel tribes from Katawaz southeast of town.[16] This last group was inspired by a leading spiritual leader, Hazrat Fazl Omar Mujaddedi (also known as Hazrat-i-Shorbazar). The king faced another defeat, this time at Ghazni, through the combined effort of his enemies and the treachery of top officials. This caused the king to finally give up his struggle and return to Kandahar. Eventually he went into exile in Italy. Meanwhile, some 6,000 Wazir and Mahsud tribesmen, under General Yar

Mohammad Waziri, gathered in British-controlled Wana and decided to march to Ghazni in support of the beleaguered King Amanullah. But the news of Amanullah's defeat in Ghazni and his retirement to Kandahar discouraged the tribesmen, and they cut short their further advance and returned to Waziristan.

There is a strong belief in Afghanistan that the downfall of King Amanullah's government was partly caused by British intelligence designs, a claim the British Indian government strongly denied. The British authorities claimed that they had barred some exile Afghan sardars of Dehra Dun to enter Afghanistan as a precaution against their involvement in the rebellion. Accordingly, the British agents stopped two sons of ex-amir Yaqub Khan (Abdur Rahman Khan and Abdullah Khan) on the border and sent them back to Dehra Dun in spite of a demand by the rebellious tribes in Khost who wanted the Sardars to join them.[17] However, Abul Karim, another son of ex-amir Yaqub Khan, with a dubious past, reached Khost and joined the rebellious tribes who recognized him as amir.[18]

Evidently, right after the independence, the British government was troubled by certain policies pursued by Amanullah, including his support of the anti-British political movements in India and stirring up the tribes particularly in Waziristan against the British rule in the North West Frontier. Kabul made every endeavor to prevent various tribes from complying with the terms of settlement demanded by the Indian government. Further, the tone of the government-controlled press in Afghanistan became more violent against the British. The *Aman-i-Afghan*, a weekly paper that took the place of *Seraj-ul-Akbar* on Amanullah's accession to the throne, had a tone that was more pan-Islamic and anti-British and in touch with Indian agitators. A biweekly paper, *Itehad-i-Mashriqi*, which was first published in February 1920, had an anti-British and a pan-Islamic tone that mostly

targeted the NWF tribes. Moreover, Amanullah's initial efforts to forge close ties with Soviet Russia disturbed the British government. However, over the next few years the situation saw many changes in the region. Kabul wanted to maintain relations with the Indian government, and the initial euphoria about Soviet assistance was overtaken by security events in Central Asia. As Amanullah's position became more and more secured internationally, the anti-British mood was relaxed into a transactional tie.

Amanullah's relations with the British government noticeably improved following his European tour, where he was accorded a warm reception in London. A classified British government report later commented that "at a Foreign Office reception held in Kabul in July a few days after his return, the King and his suite were noticeably friendly to the members of the British Legation. His Secretary remarked that it was not short of hypnotism that had changed the entire outlook of the King and his ministers in one month in England from deep founded suspicion of British policy to their present friendly and trusting attitude."[19]

It is an open question whether it was in the best interest of the British government to destabilize Afghanistan by helping a reactionary rebellion to overthrow a modern-minded ruler in Afghanistan with uncertain consequences. Some contemporary Afghan authors, including Mir Ghulam Mohammad Ghobar, speculate that the British government's move to help the brigand Kalakani in his revolt was part of a sophisticated design aimed at setting the stage for the pro-British Afghan leader Mohammad Nadir Khan to emerge as a national savior amid a chaotic situation—a very complicated scenario to manage. In any case, once Afghanistan was plunged into the grips of civil war and uncertainty, it is hardly imaginable that the British government would have stayed neutral as it claimed. There is circumstantial

evidence that Nadir Khan was assisted by the British in his bid to remove Kalakani and mount the throne of Kabul.

During the rebellion in the eastern provinces, some Afghan officials accused the British of having facilitated the travel of Sardar Omar, son of Prince Ayub Khan of Maiwand to join the anti-Amanullah revolt in eastern Afghanistan. Further rumors were spread in Afghanistan of sophisticated clandestine activities by British agents promoting unrest in Afghanistan. A sudden pop-up of a number of self-styled religious activists in the garb of *Pirs* in the area in 1929—one allegedly personified by the British Army officer Thomas Lawrence (alias Shaw)—added fuel to the perceptions.[20]

T. A. Lawrence was well known for his role in leading and facilitating the "Arab Revolt" against Ottoman Turkish rule in 1916–1918. In 1926 he was assigned to a "remote base" in British India, where he remained until the end of 1928. At that time rumors began to circulate that he was involved in espionage activities. A soldier in the British Indian army, Gilbert Lewis, wrote in a letter in 1928 that Colonel Lawrence was with the "Royal Air Force at Miranshah." Other accounts claim that between January and March 1929 Lawrence disappeared and even the India Office had no clue of his exact whereabouts or activities. There were rumors that Lawrence was active in Afghanistan, " a self-appointed agent provocateur, clad in local religious attire with *lungi* and *jhubba* and he was intimate with the tribes and began subsequently to distribute among the tribes money and arms and provoked them against [King] Amanullah. Lawrence was sent back to England by order of the Foreign Office in early 1929, just a few days after King Amanullah was overthrown by the rebels. So, did Lawrence engineer the insurgence in Afghanistan to bring down the anti-British Amanullah?"[21]

If there was any British design, the perpetrators had an easy job since, in the words of the contemporary Afghan

historian Mir Ghulam Mohammad Ghobar, “the cause of the rebellion was the mismanagement of the Afghan government and incompetence and corruption of its officials leading to the loss of popular support and trust in the state and King Amanullah. This situation was then exploited by foreign interventions and plots.”[22] Further, the tribal rebellions took a heavy toll on the government revenue. According to one source, by 1925 the cost of fighting the rebellion was estimated at five million pound sterling, which amounted to twice the annual revenue of the country.[23]

The flimsy, uneasy nine-month rule of Habibullah Kalakani was characterized by the fragmentation of power across the country. It was a civil war with multiple self-styled amirs and contenders for power. As Habibullah was struggling to expand his authority beyond Kabul and gain temporary support and allegiance from some opportunistic individuals and tribes, he was strongly opposed by the majority of Pashtuns and Hazaras, as well as those who saw a government of brigands unable to respond to the challenges of modern life. Some of Kalakani’s retrospective apologists laud him for his anecdotal personal traits of bravery, modesty, and chivalry, conveniently ignoring the brigand hero’s most backward-looking and reactionary behavior, claiming legitimacy through condemning every vital aspect of modernization and statecraft.

Habibullah’s weak basis of authority and the questionable legitimacy of his emirate had put him on a shaky political ground. He faced resistance on several fronts: the Greater Nangrahar, the southeast and southern provinces, the Hazara front in Bamian, the Logar and Maidan-Wardak front in the southwest, the Tagao Valley (northeast of Kabul), and Ghorband (northwest of Charikar). Frustrated by the lack of wide acceptance, Habibullah Kalakani and his supporters resorted to considerable oppression. The brigand-amir was unable to rein in his predatory officials, freebooters, self-

styled administrators, and swarms of carpetbaggers from the north. The Afghan chronicler Faiz Mohammad Hazara, who lived in Kabul at the time, speaks of systematic assaults, break-ins, and thefts by the adherents of Habibullah, commonly referred to as *Saqawis*.[24] Searching houses on the suspicion of hidden weapons and ammunition was used as a pretext for looting homes.[25] Sexual improprieties and discrimination against women were rising. After capturing Kabul, the *Saqawis* found the registration list containing the names of the girls attending the *Masturat* (women's) school and ordered that each of these girls be given to a Kohistani or Kohdamani man in marriage.[26] The fragmentation of authority regionalized the conflict and violence. In the east and southeast the tribes became embroiled in new and old disputes, using a multitude of people of influence to advance their parochial interests.

In the north, the power struggle was internationalized when the Soviet Union acted militarily inside Afghanistan in order to ease the pressure on King Amanullah. As the situation deteriorated in Afghanistan, Amanullah's ambassador to Moscow, Ghulam Nabi Khan, assisted by the Soviet government, crossed the Amu Darya River in April 1929 with a 1,000-strong contingent of Afghans, Uzbeks, and Turkmens disguised as Afghans and led by the former Soviet military attaché in Kabul, Colonel Vitali Primakov, himself posing as a Turkish officer.[27] The contingent penetrated deep into Afghan territory and occupied and held Mazar-i-Sharif for a while. British sources reported that the incursion was made by a force of Afghan exiles from the Soviet territory that was armed and supplied with military equipment and cash by the Soviet Union.[28] Not many Afghans of fighting ability, however, were residing in the Soviet territory at that time. Further, the Kabul expeditionary force, which was sent to counter the intruders, found evidence of the presence of Russian

soldiers in Ghulam Nabi's army. In Kabul, Habibullah ordered two columns to the north under the overall command of his minister of war, Sayed Hussein. One of the columns moved through Bamian, where it was opposed and turned back by the Hazaras, who remained loyal to Amanullah. The second column marched through the Khawak Pass, across the Hindu Kush and occupied Khanabad. The stand-off did not last long since Ghulam Nabi Khan and his Soviet allies returned across the Amu Daraya after Amanullah left the country, and Sayed Hussein took control of Mazar-i-Sharif, and the city fell to the Kalakani army.

In Herat, Amanullah's envoy to Germany, Shah-Dawlah, took control of the province after being recalled to assist the beleaguered king. The province remained loyal to Amanullah and even sent a force of 3,000 men to march to Kabul via Mazar-i-Sharif and over the Hindu Kush passes to help Amanullah. The column had hardly departed when it received reports that a pro-Habibullah army was about to attack Herat from the north. The threat soon materialized as the column under Mohammad Ghaus Khan met the Kabul army under Abdul Rahim Khan Kohistani, a former Amanullah officer who had defected to Habibullah. The forces met at Qala-i-Naw in Badghis. During a brief encounter in May 1929, the Herati force was defeated, and Abdul Rahim marched on Herat and, in collaboration with anti-Amanullah mullahs, occupied the city, driving Shah-Dawlah out of the country.

The shaky Kabul government of Habibullah was finally overthrown by military operations from the southeast, led by Nader Khan and his brothers. Nader Khan, celebrated as the victor of Thal, was reappointed commander in chief (*Sepah Salar*) by King Amanullah following the third Anglo-Afghan war. But five years later, he fell out of grace with the king over disagreements on tribal policies. Nader refused to lead the operation against the rebellion in Khost in 1924

unless certain tribal demands were accommodated. Consequently, the *Sepah Salar* was removed from his top army position and sent into exile under the guise of an ambassadorship to France. Being strongly opposed to Amanullah's progressive policies and radical reforms, Nader Khan resigned his post in 1926. It is widely believed that Nader Khan established friendly ties with the British in the hope of winning their support in his contemplated bid to replace Amanullah or succeed him once he failed to survive the public backlash to his radical changes aimed at forcefully transforming a conservative society overnight.

Shortly after the fall of Kabul to *Bach-i-Saqao*, General Mohammad Nader Khan, eyeing the throne of Kabul, left his exile in France for home to become re-engaged in Afghan politics. In fact, Habibullah Kalakani had sent an emissary to Paris asking Nader Khan to return home and work with the new regime.[29] But Nader had different plans. He left for home in mid-February 1929 along with his two brothers, Hashim Khan and Shah Wali Khan, and landed in Bombay and traveled to Peshawar, where they stayed until March 6, 1929, before leaving for Khost through the Kurram Valley. Meanwhile their other brother, Shah Mahmud Khan, former governor of Jalalabad, had fled Kabul to the Jaji district in Paktia to mobilize the tribes against Kalakani.

By mid-April 1929, Nader Khan had mustered enough support to initiate his operation against Kabul and, on April 24, he descended on Charkh in the Logar Valley, where an approximately 5,000-strong *lashkar* of Ahmadzai Ghilzai, Mangal, and Zadran tribesmen plus an infantry battalion with some pack guns and machine guns from Gardez joined him. Meanwhile, his brother, Shah Mahmud, with some 3,000 Jaji tribesmen made a short cut through Dobandi and reached Logar on April 26. Habibullah sent reinforcements to his forces in Logar under the command of Amanullah's former general, Mohammad Omar (*Soor Jarnail*). The

Kalakani army, in collaboration with the Ahmadzais, who betrayed Nader, forced the tribal *lashkars* to retire south on April 28. There, he also failed to hold Gardez and retreated in June into Mangal territory. After regrouping his forces around Gardez, Nader Khan made another attempt, on July 10, to take Kabul. This second offensive in Logar failed again. Then Nader launched a major information campaign to mobilize people against the "rule of terror under the bandit Amir of Kabul." As opposition to Habibullah, who was unable or unwilling to rein in his predator cohorts, was fast increasing, Nader Khan's struggle gained momentum in the summer of 1929. This was in spite of Habibullah's success in capturing Gardez and sending an army to Kandahar, which occupied the city and arrested the self-styled amir Shahghassi Ali Ahmad Jan. The ill-fated royal contender met his death in a brutal manner. Habibullah reportedly nailed his arms and feet to the ground and drove a nail through his head. Other sources claim that he was tied to the muzzle of a cannon and blown to pieces when the cannon was fired.[30]

Nader Khan launched his third offensive against Kabul in late August 1929. He recaptured Gardez and seized a much-needed supply of arms and ammunition. His operation coincided with the defeat of Habibullah's forces by the Hazaras in Sar-Chesham, 30 miles northwest of Kabul. Meanwhile, the Wazir and Mahsud tribesmen responded to Nader Khan's call to join him in overthrowing the *Saqawi* regime. A 4,500-strong tribal *lashkar* under General Yar Mohammad Wazir and other Wazir and Mahsud tribal leaders linked up with Jaji, Mangal, and Zadran tribesmen around Khost and joined Nader Khan's forces in Ali Khel. Then the combined forces, under Shah Wali Khan, with the Wazirs in the lead, marched on Kabul through the Logar Valley.

A tribal Jirga, attended by all tribes and General Mohammad Nader Khan, agreed to follow Nader Khan as the

interim leader until Amanullah returned and was restored on the throne in Kabul.[31] The Kabul *Saqawi* army, under Commander in Chief Pordil and some other officers who had entered Habibullah's service, including General Mohammad Omar Nasseri (*Soor Jarnail*), was entrenched in the Tangi Waghjan and on the Chaharasia hills, blocking the main access to the capital. The Tangi Waghjan gorge was seized by a few hundred Waziris in a night attack. On October 6, 1929, the tribal *lashkar*, under Shah Wali Khan, feinted a retreat, which drew the Kabul army out of its strong position in Chaharasia, and then returned in force to engage the enemy in the open. They wreaked havoc within the confused ranks of Habibullah's army. The *Saqawi* forces fled headlong into Kabul, which fell on October 10. Three days later, Habibullah fled the Arg, which was under heavy artillery barrage from the surrounding heights.[32] The Kabul citizens suffered once again from the plundering tribes as they descended on the capital. The victorious tribesmen were busy looting the city for three days until the situation was brought under control.

With the defeat of Habibullah, who was later arrested and executed along with his close aides, Nader Khan was proclaimed king with the title of Nader Shah. King Amanullah attempted to return, but Nader Khan made every effort to block his return to Afghanistan. Thus, a new Durrani dynasty, known as the Mosaheban, was founded by Nader Shah.

King Amanullah's struggle for modernizing Afghanistan coincided with fundamental political and social changes in Turkey and Iran. In Turkey, Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) successfully introduced a series of political, legal, cultural, social, and economic policy changes that were designed to convert the new Republic of Turkey into a secular modern nation-state. The thrust of these reforms was based on the conviction that Turkish society would have to Westernize

itself both politically and culturally in order to modernize. Similarly, in Iran, Reza Shah presided over deep reforms, reorganizing the army, government administration, and finances. He abolished all special rights granted to foreigners, thus gaining real independence for Iran. In both cases (Turkey and Iran) the reformers succeeded in their efforts with the support of a strong and committed military—an instrument that was lacking in Afghanistan.

Amanullah had established the legitimacy of his reign by waging a successful anti-British war to regain full independence. However, he lost support among the tribes due to his drastic modernization reforms. His push for rapid modernization was not matched by efforts to build an effective military force to back his reforms. Counting on the nation's martial qualities to deter foreign threats, the reformist monarch did not see a compelling need for a large army. In July 1923, he told the people, "These are the days of the pen, not of the sword. . . . Therefore send your sons to school. Our martial qualities are sufficient, it is education that we lack."[33] But the nation's "martial qualities" had also the potential to be directed against the government itself. His neglect had a disastrous impact. Most of the modernization plans were not implemented, the size of the military was ruthlessly cut, and troops were poorly trained and ineffectively led. The army soon shrank to 23,000 and eventually to 11,000 because of recruitment problems. His last-minute effort in 1928 failed to reverse the decline, and consequently the Afghan army failed to quell the rebellion in 1928–1929 that cost Amanullah his throne and plunged the country into the grips of a civil war.

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9 The Cold War and the Soviet Invasion

1929–1979

A half-century of relative peace (1929–1978) and foreign assistance helped Afghanistan build modern state institutions and economic infrastructure, both of which facilitated national integration and expanded the writ of the central government throughout the country. However, Kabul's lack of capacity and resources to respond effectively to the periphery's needs for good governance and public services left traditional power structures and informal conflict resolution institutions intact and functional. Kabul often supplemented informal institutions without competing with them. These informal structures were particularly active in tribal areas.

Nader Shah restored a sense of stability to the country and continued the reforms in a measured and closely controlled way. The uprising of the Ghilzais of Ghazni and Muqur under Abdur Rahman Taraki related to Ghazi Sher Jan (the hero of the Ahmad Khel Battle in 1880) was quelled through the mediation of the spiritual leader Hazrat-i-Shorbazar. The rising in Kohdaman (north of Kabul), the hotbed of Kalakani supporters, however, was brutally crushed. There, Nader Shah's poorly trained army failed to pacify the area, and its commander, Abdul Wakil Nuristani, was killed while fighting

the insurgents. Having seen the seriousness of the threat in the vicinity of the capital, Nader Shah called on his allied tribes in Paktia and sent them to crush the rebellion. Inspired by a wild passion of avenging the brutalities of the Kalakani regime and the excesses of its unbridled gangs, the vindictive tribes spared no brutality while killing and looting to defeat the insurgency. They not only trounced the rebels but also embarked on a rampage of plunder and destruction and took away women as spoils of war. The brutality left a scar on the public memory of the area, triggering a dangerous Pashtun-Tajik ethnic disgust for a long time.

Having consolidated his power, Nader Shah declared his 10-point policy action plan in November 1932, which recognized the tenets of Islam and the observance of the *Hanafi fiqh* (jurisprudence) as the foundation of the government. He also announced that the diplomatic relations established by Amanullah with foreign countries would be continued along with the expansion of commercial relations with other nations. He also took steps in building state institutions, including the reopening of military schools and establishing a defense industrial infrastructure. Nader Shah put his brothers and his staunch supporters in charge of key government positions. He appointed his brother, Hashim Khan, as prime minister and entrusted the War Ministry to his other brother, Shah Mahmud. He also founded a consultative body to rubber-stamp royal decisions. Having suffered under the nine-month instability, fighting, and chaos, the majority of the population welcomed the change, notwithstanding the autocratic practices of the government. Meanwhile, Nader Shah's conservative policies, including reinstituting the *hijab* (*pardah*) for women and establishing the religious police (*Ehtessab*), won him the support of influential clerics.

In July 1931, Afghanistan signed a new treaty of neutrality and nonaggression with the Soviet Union, which called on both sides to not accommodate elements hostile to the other

party on their territory–an important clause at the time since the Basmachi insurgency was still active in Soviet Central Asia. The insurgency in Central Asia had spilled over to northeastern Afghanistan (Qataghan Province) as large numbers of Basmachis fled to the Afghan side of the border and set up their camps for cross-border attacks into Soviet Tajikistan. This situation caused the Soviet forces to enter Afghanistan in hot pursuit of the insurgents in 1930. They advanced up to 40 miles into Afghan territory. The Afghan government's actions to contain the Central Asian fugitives caused local rebellions in the north. They were led by a prominent Basmachi leader, Ibrahim Beg of the *Laqay* Uzbek tribe, an associate of Enver Pasha. Nader Shah sent his brother, Shah Mahmud, the war minister, to pacify the area. He defeated the lawless forces in the northern provinces after a long campaign that involved a great deal of fighting and heavy-handedness. In the meantime, he drove Ibrahim Beg across the Amu Darya into Soviet territory, where he was betrayed by local Tajik villagers, arrested by the Soviet authorities, and later executed.

The major achievement of Nader Shah was in restoring relative peace in the country and renewing state building efforts, which were disrupted by the civil war of 1929. His role was similar to that which Amir Dost Mohammad (1792–1863) and Amir Abdur Rahman (1840–1901) played in reunifying the country following wars and disintegration. He paid attention to rebuilding the armed forces and modernizing its organization, armament, and training. At the same time, he supported the development of the sociocultural sector, expanded education institutions, and founded the Literary Association (Anjuman-i-Adabi). Nader Shah also laid the foundation for modern print media, although under strict government censorship of any publication. Thus, the restoration of peace in 1929 ushered in a period of tight government control and a strictly measured modernization process.

Nader Shah was not short on enemies who challenged him for different reasons, including his “usurping” the throne meant to be regained for the legitimate King Amanullah. Many tribes, particularly the Wazirs and Mahsuds of Waziristan, pledged support of Nader with the understanding that he would restore King Amanullah to the throne. When Nader was declared king immediately after taking Kabul, it disappointed many Wazirs and some other tribes.[1] In March 1931 an Indian paper (*Zamindar*) based in Lahore published a long letter allegedly written by Amanullah accusing Nadir of disloyalty, bad faith, and selling the independence of Afghanistan to the British.[2] Copies of the letter smuggled inside Afghanistan led to a flood of pro-Amanullah and anti-Nadir agitation. The pro-Amanullah agitation rapidly increased during the former king’s travel to Mecca in April 1931 for pilgrimage, and there were talks of the king’s return to Afghanistan. Nevertheless with the return of Amanullah to Rome the excitement subsided. Meanwhile, in India, the British viceroy issued a special ordinance prohibiting the publication of matter likely to adversely affect relations with foreign governments.

Many pro-reform and progressive forces felt similar disillusionment. Meanwhile, Nader Shah antagonized others with his autocratic rule and his suppression of the reform constituency and constitution movement that had emerged since the turn of the century. Feeling insecure against critics and political opposition, Nader crushed the dissidents who he perceived were standing in the way of his absolute power. Nader Shah was also criticized for his pro-British policies, manifested in his persistent lobbying of the British government to support him in gaining power, as he presented himself as the one who could bring stability to Afghanistan and secure common British and Afghanistan security interests.[3] In October 1930 the British government presented the Afghan government a gift of £175,000 and

10,000 rifles. The publication of the aid in the press in February 1931 caused the Afghan authorities great consternation. It led to much anti-Nader propaganda on the score of Nader's having sold his country: "There is every reason to believe that the tribes on both side of the border consider Nadir Shah the bought man of the Government of India."[4]

Nader Shah's hostility to Amanullah's loyalists, particularly the Charkhi family, resulted in a blood feud that eventually cost the shah's life. Ghulam Nabi Khan Charkhi and his brothers, Mohammad Siddique and Ghulam Jailani (sons of the celebrated Ghulam Haidar Khan Charkhi, commander in chief of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan), all held key positions under Amanullah. Ghulam Nabi Khan led the Soviet-backed forces from Central Asia across the Amu Darya into Afghanistan in the spring of 1929 to restore Amanullah to the throne. After the accession of Nader Shah, there was a brief reconciliation period between the king and the Charkhis. The truce, however, was short lived. Ghulam Nabi Khan had become a center of attention for pro-Amanullah adherents. This led the government intelligence to suspicions of the Charkhis building up forces to stage a coup to restore Amanullah. The suspicions prompted Nader to get rid of the Charkhis. On November 8, 1932, Nader called Ghulam Nabi to the palace and, after accusing him of treason, ordered his aides to beat him to death while he watched. The following day, a government-installed body issued a ruling condemning the Charkhi to death—ignoring the fact that the sentence had been carried out before the trial and the ruling. Exactly one year later (November 8, 1933), on the anniversary of Ghulam Nabi Khan's murder, a school student, Abdul Khaleq, who was the son of a servant of the Charkhi family, shot Nader Shah to death at an education ceremony. Nader's brothers immediately declared his 19-year-old son as his successor, who assumed the title of

Mohammad Zahir Shah. The young king, partly with support of his powerful uncles, ruled the country for 40 years.

During the next half century the military history of Afghanistan was influenced by three main political and geopolitical trends:

- building the capacity of the armed forces to support the writ of the central government over the peripheries and crushing local rebellions;
- the partition of India and its geopolitical fallout with the emergence of Pakistan;
- the geopolitical polarization of the world in the context of the Cold War.

The Modernization of the Afghan Army

The modernization of the armed forces that began in the first quarter of the twentieth century was a slow and incremental process. The national army became more attached to the government and acquired a solid institutional identity as the country underwent a process of integration through a nationwide education system, economic progress, and political development.

Nader Shah saw that the reconstruction and improvement of the army was a key element in responding to security challenges and supporting a measured modernization process. He rebuilt the military and rearmed the troops since the weapons were lost and looted during the rebellion. In 1930, a gift of 10,000 .303 rifles from the British government brought some relief. During the next two years, the campaign against the Ghilzais in Ghazni and the Ibrahim Beg troubles in the north raised the need for a large number of troops. By 1933, the army was estimated at 50,000. The military college reopened in November 1930, and one year later artillery, cavalry, and infantry schools were established

in Kabul with a few German, Italian, and Turkish officers employed as instructors in these schools. The NCO training did not receive much attention and remained a poorly trained section of the army. During the period of relative peace following the accession of Zahir Shah to the throne, few steps were taken for major changes in the military forces. The breakout of the Suleiman Khel Ghilzai disturbances in Katawaz reemphasized the importance of the army as an effective instrument of stabilization within the multiethnic society of Afghanistan.[5] During the fighting seasons (summer) of 1937 and 1938, up to one-third of the army was deployed in Katawaz to pacify the area while in summer of 1938 additional troops were dispatched to quell the Shinwari and Mohmand insurrections in the eastern provinces. Early next year (1939), regular army forces were employed to suppress the revolt of Alizai Durranis in the Kandahar Province.

The need to increase the number of troops rapidly hindered progress in training and the institutional development of the armed forces. The organization developed slowly and cohesiveness lagged. The cost of stability operations caused a drain on spending on the professional development of the armed forces while the living conditions in the barracks remained substandard. Afghanistan, however, acquired more advanced weapon systems from different countries during this period. These included 25,000 English .303 rifles, 40 Skoda 75 mm guns, and 32 105 mm howitzers from Czechoslovakia, 36 81 mm mortars and 108 different caliber artillery pieces from Germany.[6] The mobility of army units was enhanced by the purchase of 300 heavy trucks, 200 of which were based in Kabul to facilitate the rapid deployment of the central mobile striking force to the provinces when needed.

The development of a national recruitment system and the professional education of officers and NCOs were among the major achievements of the Afghan military in the first half of

the twentieth century. The unpopular *hasht nafari* was replaced by a universal draft system in 1941. Under this system all able-bodied male citizens (except those from certain Pashtun tribes in Paktia and Kandahar, mullahs, and teachers) were required to serve two years in the armed forces, after which they remained on the books as reservists until the age of 46. The population of Afghanistan in the 1930s and early 1940s was estimated at 10 million, and 12,000–20,000 conscripts were called up annually, as the standing army numbered between 60,000 and 70,000. Given the stocks of armaments and the support system, no more than 100,000 regular troops and 300,000 tribal levies could be counted on even in a popular religious war.[7]

One of the main features of the modernization of the army in the second quarter of the twentieth century was the creation and development of the air force. After the decision to establish the Afghan air force was made in 1924, the fleet of combat aircraft expanded from 5 monoplanes to over 50 modern combat aircraft in 15 years. The effectiveness of the aircraft in crushing the Katawaz rebellion in Ghazni and the Alizai uprising in Kandahar in 1937–1938 encouraged the Afghan government to step up the development of the air force through elaborate programs of pilot training in India, Britain, Italy, Russia, and Germany, to purchase more advanced combat planes, and to establish the ground infrastructure in Kabul and some other provincial centers.[8] Owing to the limited capacity of the old aerodrome at Sherpur, the Khwaja Rawash airport, with its technical and maintenance facilities, was constructed north of Kabul in 1939 to support the air force expansion. In the same year, the air force command was set up, modeled on the RAF structure in British India. It included the headquarters, two squadrons of British Hawker Hind light bombers (24 planes), one squadron of Italian Romeo light bombers (12 planes), and a squadron of Breda trainer planes (8 airframes). Four Hawker Hind and four Romeo aircraft constituted the

reserve.[9] The Afghan air force significantly strengthened the writ of the central government, and it localized and crushed rebellions. It also became an arm of deterrence, discouraging defiance of the Afghan government.

The draft system provided for ethnic diversity in army formations. Recruits from different ethnic and geographic communities were integrated into professional military outfits. Under the system, the army was considered both a security force and a national educational institute where Afghan youth also received literacy and civic education. The army was the most significant integrating institution in a multiethnic society. In later years, thousands of recruits were assigned to the public work force, *Qoway-e Kar*, which built and restored roads and bridges across the country, and the agricultural force, *Qoway-e Sabz*, as well as the gendarmerie and the police.

In the meantime, an elaborate system of basic and higher officer training institutions was established. This helped create a professional military culture and enhance the command and control system. Large numbers of officers received professional training abroad, mostly in the Soviet Union, the United States, Turkey, France, Italy, India, and Egypt. The modern military education system prepared professional cadres for operating modern aircraft, armored vehicles, artillery pieces, and missile technology.

The introduction of modern weapons into the army, particularly combat aircraft, armored vehicles, artillery, and automatic weapons, brought a landmark shift in the correlation of forces between the center and the tribal areas. The superior firepower of the state army began to serve as a deterrence against domestic security challenges. This coupled with a state-funded education system and economic development programs helped national integration and the expansion of the central government control. The situation enabled the army to respond successfully to simultaneous internal disturbances including the Katawaz rebellion in

1937–1939, the Shinwari revolt of 1938, Alizai-Durrani unrest in 1939, and the rebellion of the Safi tribe in the eastern Kunar province in 1945–1947.

Afghanistan continued to pursue an absolute nonaligned policy and stayed out of World War II in spite of the spread of strong pro-Axis sentiments in the country. Fearing the fate of Iran, where the shah was deposed by the allies and his country was occupied by Anglo-Soviet forces, the Afghan government complied with the demand of the Allies to expel Germens and Italians except the members of their diplomatic missions. Meanwhile, Afghanistan continued the enhancement of the professional capacity of its army. Toward the end of the 1940s, the Afghan armed forces (including the gendarmerie) numbered about 90,000 troops. This consisted of 75,000 ground troops, 300 air force, and 13,000 gendarmerie. The army was organized into seven divisions and two army corps. The Central Corps, headquartered in Kabul, included two infantry divisions, a separate combined arms guard brigade, a separate infantry regiment, an armor unit, and other corps units. The Southern Corps, headquartered in Khost, consisted of two infantry divisions and corps units. The air force comprised two or three light bomber squadrons and one training squadron. The officer training was helped by instructors from Turkey, Britain, and India.[10] The other three divisions were based in the west and up in the north.

The development of the armed forces and the evolution of the military culture in Afghanistan were influenced by the political situation and the system of governance in the country. Between 1930 and 1946, when the omnipotent Prime Minister Sardar Hashim Khan exercised absolute power in ruling the country, the military, like other state institutions, was kept under strict control with the help of a wide web of government spies and informants. In spite of the improvement in organization, training, and armament, the development of a professional culture within the officer corps

remained stagnant and opportunistic. Officers were discouraged from reading educational materials other than their military manuals and pamphlets, which kept them close-minded, insecure, and blindly obedient, which hindered creativity, initiative, and flexibility. As Afghanistan applied for membership in the United Nations, the king and his advisors decided to introduce a certain amount of openness and civil liberties in the country by removing Sardar Hashim Khan and appointing Sardar Shah Mahmud Khan as prime minister with a reform agenda. The relative easing of government control ushered in a short period of democratic shifts, including the emergence of political associations as the nucleus of political parties, a free press, and relatively free parliamentary elections in 1949. The constitutional changes strongly touched the military establishment by instilling patriotic motivations for service among the officer corps instead of their traditional dynastic attachment.

The Afghan “glasnost” coincided with the partition of India and the emergence of the state of Pakistan, a situation where Afghanistan objected to the inclusion of the North West Frontier in the new state without Afghanistan’s consent. Further, the rapidly changing geopolitical situation in the region and beyond led to a new political context in the region. As the dispute with Pakistan over the future of Pashtun tribes intensified, a martial mood prevailed within the ruling elite in Afghanistan. A change of guard at the helm of premiership along with a more aggressive policy was deemed necessary. Further, the progress in the political activities of opposition politicians and associations moved far beyond the level of tolerance of the palace. The short period of openness had to come to an end. In September 1953, King Zahir Shah appointed his cousin General Mohammad Daud as prime minister, opening a new era in Afghanistan’s domestic and foreign policies.

Indian Partition and the Issue of Pashtunistan

In spite of the Afghan government's acceptance of the Indo-Afghan frontier, as demarcated by the various commissions from 1893 and within the context of the Anglo-Afghan treaties of 1906, 1919, and 1921, Afghanistan continued to maintain a special relationship with the Pashtun tribes across the Durand Line. Many Afghan statesmen expected that once Britain left, the border issue would be open to new negotiations. However the post-Amanullah rulers showed reluctance to reopen the issue, even while the British government was discussing the independence of India with its indigenous leaders and political parties. The failure to pursue an active diplomacy by the Afghan government excluded Kabul from having a say in the future of the Pashtun tribes, which Afghanistan considered part of the Afghan nation, a nation dismembered through forced and unfair treaties imposed on weakened amirs.

In legal terms, Afghanistan argued that the Durand Line treaty was signed by Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, who was installed on the Afghan throne by the British following the second Anglo-Afghan war in 1880. Further, the line, as stated in official British army publications, "was not described as the boundary of India but as the eastern and southern frontier of the Amir's dominions and the limits of respective spheres of influence of the two governments, the object being the extension of British authority and not that of the Indian frontier."[11] The status of the line was similarly described in some other official documents. In 1947, however, on the eve of the Partition of India, the British recognized the Durand Line as the international boundary of India and thus recognized it as the international boundary of Pakistan with Afghanistan when Pakistan was carved out of British dominions in India as a separate state, which included the areas taken from Afghanistan following the second Anglo-Afghan war (1878–1980). Meanwhile, Pakistan claimed

that even if there were questions about the original treaty, the Durand Line was ratified three times in subsequent treaties.

But far beyond its legal complications, the Durand Line, which split the Afghan population in two, had always been imbued with national, political, and cultural underpinnings. The Afghan government belatedly launched a diplomatic offensive demanding the Pashtuns be given an opportunity for self-determination in consultation with Afghanistan. In August 1947, the British government assured the visiting Afghan prime minister, Shah Mahmud, in London that the cultural affinity of Afghans and Pashtuns of the North West Frontier would be ensured, and a similar message was received from Lord Mountbatten, the last British viceroy in India, who was negotiating the partition. He assured the Afghan ambassador, Najibullah, that the issue of the Pashtuns' future would be attended to in good time.

In a pre-partition referendum, the North West Frontier Province tribes were given the choice to join a "Muslim" Pakistan or a "Hindu" India. The choice of the devoted Muslim tribes was obvious—Pakistan. Afghanistan nationalists protested the narrowness of options in the plebiscite and stated that independence and joining Afghanistan should have also been offered as the choices. For this reason the prominent leader of the frontier Pashtuns, Ghaffar Khan, and his Khudai Khidmatgar followers chose to boycott the polls along with other nationalistic Pashtuns. Some have argued that a segment of the voting population was barred from voting. However, once the partition was finalized and the borders of the emerging nations were officially recognized, Afghanistan's demands found little support from the British government or the United States, which looked at the issue from the British historical perspective. Washington's policy was also strongly influenced by its strategic partnership with Pakistan.

The US State Department never agreed with the Afghanistan position on the issue of Pashtuns and "Pashtunistan." At a meeting in Kabul in March 1951, the visiting US assistant secretary of state, George McGhee, made a number of points to the Afghan foreign minister, Ali Mohammad. In the judgment of the United States, he noted,

> the area called Pashtunistan was not economically and politically viable. An independent Pashtunistan would have no experienced leaders to handle its relations with neighbors. The internal political situation in Pakistan was such that Liaquat Ali Khan could not maintain his position were he to make any considerable concessions on the tribal area. The timing of Afghan sponsorship of Pashtunistan was very important. We were trying now to prepare as rapidly as possible for a united effort in containing Soviet aggression. Keeping the Pashtunistan issue alive could harm Afghanistan by creating conditions that could lead to Soviet intervention. Without foreclosing action in the future, it would be better now for Afghanistan to seek a modus vivendi with Pakistan on Pashtunistan.[12]

The United States, however, offered its good offices to help the two countries settle their dispute. The US offer, however, was mostly aimed at defusing the tension in the region in support of America's larger geopolitical interests, with little regard for the Afghans' passionate struggle for the Pashtuns' right to self-determination, which Pakistan never recognized as a negotiable issue. Consequently, McGhee's visits to Afghanistan failed to lead to a breakthrough, and finally in October 1951, the United States withdrew its offer to act as a go-between.

It is widely believed in Afghanistan that the government of King Zahir Shah, for unknown reasons, failed to act forcefully in support of the Afghans' claims to the North West Frontier before and during the Partition. Among the top leaders, Sardar Mohammad Daud, the minster of war, however, felt passionately about the question of the tribes (Pashtunistan). The years leading up to the Partition of India (1945–1947) coincided with the Kunar rebellion in Afghanistan and the deployment of strong military forces in the greater Nangrahar area to quell the tribal uprising. Sardar

Mohammad Daud Khan assumed overall command and control of the operation from a forward command post in Jalalabad. After defeating the rebellion and making peace with the tribes, the sardar kept the brigades in the field and, with the excuse of preventing the resumption of the rebellion, he deployed six well-equipped brigades on the border.[13] The move was interpreted in Kabul as the sardar's intending to initiate a military probe across the Durand Line in order to mobilize the North West Frontier Province tribes in support of the Afghan claims on the territory while the Partition of India was being processed.[14] It was at this time that the king removed Daud from his position and sent him as Afghanistan's ambassador to France.

The failure of the Afghan government to pursue the issue through early diplomatic overtures and to find peaceful ways to establish constructive relations with the emerging nation of Pakistan led to the beginning of enduring strained relations with Pakistan, despite a number of diplomatic contacts after the partition. The bombing of an Afghan border village (Moghulgay) in Khost by Pakistani planes in 1949 fueled more animosity, prompting the Afghan national assembly to adopt a resolution unilaterally repudiating all nineteenth-century treaties with British India, including the Durand Line, on the grounds that the agreement signatories were deceased and it should be renegotiated. Since then, no Afghan government, including the pro-Pakistani Taliban regime, has ever recognized the validity of the Durand Line, which became the de facto border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

With the rise of Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan as prime minister in 1953, "Pashtunistan" became a major issue in Afghanistan's domestic and foreign policies. The dispute between Afghanistan and Pakistan over Pashtunistan further intensified in 1955, when the province was merged into the new entity of West Pakistan under the "One Unit" policy. The scheme consolidated the provinces of Punjab, Sind,

Baluchistan, and North West Frontier Province into the single political unit of West Pakistan to give it electoral parity with the more populous province of Bengal, now dubbed East Pakistan.

The policy was seen in Afghanistan as a scheme changing the unique identity and administrative status of the tribal areas. The Afghans, with a certain level of government encouragement, reacted by staging massive demonstrations in Kabul, Kandahar, and Jalalabad. The protesters attacked the Pakistan embassy in Kabul and its consulates in Jalalabad and Kandahar and set fire to the Pakistani flag in Kabul. The Pakistanis retaliated with similar action against the Afghan consulate in Peshawar. Although the tension was defused in September 1955, with representatives of both sides ceremoniously raising the flag of the respective countries over their diplomatic missions, the incidents left a deep mark on the bilateral relationship. Shortly afterward, Pakistani blocking of the transit routes to land-locked Afghanistan made Kabul turn to the Soviet Union for transit access to the outside world. This led to the signing of the transit treaty with the Soviet Union in June 1955. The terms of the treaty were advantageous to Afghanistan. The move resulted in Pakistan's change of policy and reopened the transit route to Afghanistan, but the situation had pushed Kabul to expand relationships with the Soviet Union.

It is often said that Afghanistan's refusal to join the US-sponsored Baghdad Defensive Pact[15] led to the United States denying Afghanistan military assistance. In fact, it was mainly the Pashtunistan issue that contributed to the misperceptions in the United States about Afghanistan and its geopolitical significance in the region. Washington's view of Pakistan, seen through the British prism, greatly dimmed the political and strategic picture of Afghanistan. One of the fateful consequences of these misperceptions was the US reluctance to arm Afghanistan with American weapons, allowing the Soviet Union to seize the opportunity and

influence Afghanistan through its arms supplies. This happened after Afghanistan's repeated attempts to get military aid from the United States failed. Afghanistan's attempts to acquire American arms have a much longer history. Starting in 1935, and for more than 20 years, Afghanistan missed no opportunity to push for the purchase of weapons from America. But its more than a dozen attempts to get Washington's approval failed, initially due to technical and bureaucratic hurdles and later because of Washington's distorted and ill-advised geopolitical perceptions regarding the region.

During World War II, London opposed the supply of American military hardware to Afghanistan, claiming that the arms could reach the frontier tribes, where the Germans were trying to stir up troubles for the British Raj. After the war, in spite of the US containment policy aimed at preventing the spread of communism, Afghanistan was conspicuously ignored as a first-line state under the threat of Soviet influence. As early as the 1930s, one of the major foreign policy goals of the Afghanistan government was the "elimination of Soviet penetration of Afghanistan."[16]Afghanistan was one of three states in the Middle East and West Asia that bordered the Soviet Union. The United States signed defensive treaties in 1954 with Turkey and Iran, the two other states bordering the Soviet Union, but bypassed Afghanistan. Instead, Washington signed a mutual defense pact with Pakistan and agreed to provide Pakistan with military aid. Influenced by the British experience in Afghanistan, the United States had all but written off Afghanistan as a player in the East-West competition of the Cold War. In 1948 the visiting Afghan prime minister, Shah Mahmud, met Secretary of State George Marshall and strongly pleaded for military aid for Afghanistan. "Who is the enemy?" asked the secretary, to which the prime minister replied, "The Russians." Marshall

broke out in mocking laughter at the suggestion that the Afghans could possibly oppose Soviet military might.[17]

In another meeting in Washington in 1951, the Afghan ambassador, Prince Mohammad Naim, hinted to the assistant secretary of state, George C. McGhee, that without US military aid Kabul might seek military assistance from the Soviet Union. McGhee considered the suggestion as some type of bluff and sarcastically handed the prince the phone number of the Soviet embassy in Washington.[18] In fact, McGhee's attempts to include Afghanistan within the US security zone in the Middle East failed partly because of the remoteness of Afghanistan in the minds of policy makers in Washington. One example was a secret study of the chiefs of staff in 1953, which read: "Afghanistan is of little or no strategic importance to the United States. It is situated on the perimeter of the USSR. It remains nominally independent of Soviet domination, but its geographic location, coupled with the realization by Afghan leaders of Soviet capabilities, presages Soviet control of the country whenever the situation so dictates."[19]

This was the time when the US containment policy aimed at countering real and perceived moves by the Soviet Union to expand communism abroad. One of the main instruments of such policy was making military alliances and offering substantial foreign aid to underdeveloped nations in exchange for signing mutual security agreements with the United States. As Louis Dupree notes, most nations "jumped on the American gravy train, but more from their own selfish national interests than to help prevent the spread of international Communists. In 1954–1955, Pakistan, for example, on the verge of economic and political collapse, became deeply involved in the American military web when it signed the Mutual Security Agreements with the U.S.A."[20] According to US diplomats on the scene at the time, some Afghan military officials wanted to join the US security camp

but demanded assurances that they would be defended by the United States if their acceptance of arms aid precipitated a Russian invasion or major subversive efforts inside Afghanistan. Given the perception that Afghanistan was not important in the defense of the "free world" for strategic reasons, American military planners decided against giving such assurances. In spite of this, the Afghans asked the Americans once again for arms assistance to adjust to the disrupted balance of power in the region. Afghan government officials questioned the American arming of Pakistan as Pakistan and the Soviet Union have no common border—a question shared by India.[21] US arms in Pakistan only changed the balance of power in the region.

The final Afghanistan request for US military aid was made in October 1954, after General Eisenhower became the US president, and General Daud, the new Afghan prime minister, felt that his request for military aid would be favorably considered by a fellow military leader in Washington. The Afghan foreign minister, Mohammad Naim, traveled to Washington and presented the Afghan government's request to the secretary of state, John Foster Dulles. Two months later, on December 28, Dulles replied in a letter to the Afghan ambassador in Washington, saying that "after careful consideration, extending military aid to Afghanistan would create problems not offset by the strength it would generate. Instead of asking for arms, Afghanistan should settle the Pashtunistan dispute with Pakistan."[22] The Afghan government was disappointed and felt insulted. Kabul was particularly outraged when Dulles, in a blatant breach of diplomatic norms, sent a copy of the letter to the Pakistani ambassador in Washington. Just a month later, Prime Minister Daud accepted the Soviet offer of military assistance, which Kabul previously rejected. A formal agreement was signed a year later, after an Afghan *Loya Jirga* (Grand Assembly) authorized the government to get military assistance from any available source. Consequently,

the Afghan government was forced to reorient its policy toward its “great northern neighbor.” A quarter of a century later, Afghanistan was the only country in the region that fought a bloody war against Soviet Communism and forced the Soviet army out. It was also in Afghanistan that the United States waged the longest covert war against the Soviet Union in the region. Less than a half-century later, Afghanistan was the only country in the region from which the United States was attacked, forcing the United States to invade Afghanistan.

Soviet Military Penetration

The Afghan government called a *Loya Jirga* in November 1955 to make vital national decisions on the issue of Pashtunistan and on enhancing the Afghan army’s capacity of fighting foreign invasion. The gathering authorized the government to pursue the issue of Pashtunistan and acquire modern weapons and military hardware from any available sources. Just about three weeks after the *Loya Jirga* of 1955, top Soviet leaders, Party Secretary General Nikita Khrushchev and Prime Minister Nikolai Bulganin, visited Kabul from December 16 to December 18. The Soviet leaders voiced support for Afghanistan’s position on Pashtunistan and offered all-round assistance to Afghanistan, including a credit of 100 million dollars for economic development. Later Moscow also announced an unspecified range of military assistance, which over the years increased incrementally.

In 1955, Afghanistan received approximately 25 million dollars’ worth of military hardware. In addition, the Soviet bloc also began the construction of military airfields in Bagram, Mazar-i-Sharif, and Shindand. By the 1960s, Soviet assistance became apparent in the structure, armament, training, and command and control arrangements of the

military. During the next 10 years Afghanistan adopted the Soviet military training and operational military doctrine system that required the translation and adaptation of hundreds of Soviet armed forces tactical and field manuals, technical pamphlets, textbooks, and methodologies of training for military operations. Instead of fitting the new armament and equipment into the existing army and air force structure, the very organization of the armed forces was changed to make it compatible with the new Soviet-style doctrine in tactics, operational art, and strategy. Soviet assistance enabled Afghanistan to improve the structure, armament, training, and command and control system of the armed forces. The strength of the military in the 1960s reached 98,000, including 90,000 in the army and 8,000 in the air force. The reserve in the mid-1970s was estimated at 150,000 to 200,000. The army was organized into three army corps and four separate divisions, three armored brigades, two mountain brigades, one artillery brigade, and other combat support and service formations. The air force had 250 combat, transport, and training aircraft and helicopters. The air force regiments were based in Kabul, Bagram, Shindand, and Mazar-i-Sharif, and some units were also based in Jalalabad. The armed forces also included a 21,000-strong gendarmerie organized in battalions and regiments and a 25,000-strong public works force organized in companies, battalions, and construction units.

While the modernization of Afghanistan’s armed forces evolved over more than two decades, the Afghan-Pakistan conflict continued to flare up from time to time. One of the major escalations came in October 1961, when Afghanistan sent tribal *lashkars* with advisors from the Afghan armed forces to the Bajaur agency in support of a pro-Afghan tribal chief opposed to a Pakistani-backed local khan. The situation led to bloody clashes with losses on both sides, forcing the Afghan *lashkars* to retire to Kunar. The tension somewhat eased following the resignation of Prime Minister Daud Khan

in 1963 and the initiation of a détente policy by King Zahir Shah during the so-called decade of democracy. The thaw in relations was manifested in Kabul's military restraint during Pakistani wars with India in 1965 and 1971, when Pakistan was militarily vulnerable on its western border. Afghanistan had given advance assurance to Pakistan that Kabul would not exploit the situation when Pakistan was in war and its western border was thinly covered by its army.

The Cold War and Sociopolitical Changes

At the beginning of the second half of the century, Afghanistan became a peaceful battlefield of the Cold War, with both superpowers vying for influence through economic assistance. But, as noted, Afghanistan's border dispute with Pakistan, an ally of the West, forced the Afghan government to turn to the Soviet Union for military assistance—a move that had a major impact on the country's future. This focus coincided with democratic changes from 1963 to 1973 in Afghanistan. The top-down democratic changes paved the way for the expansion of civil society and the emergence of a new urban-based educated elite as the core of political opposition to the government. Although the liberalization produced few lasting reforms and viable democratic institutions, it gave rise to differing political movements that featured a pro-Soviet communist block, embodied by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), and a revolutionary Islamist movement represented by activists clustered around several religious figures, some of whom later formed the Mujahedin political parties. The king's failure to promulgate the law on political parties prevented the rise of mainstream parties, allowing the growth of unofficial extremist opposition parties, which dominated the Afghan political scene.[23] The rise to power of these new elites brought enormous violence and destruction to the

nation. They fiercely fought one another in street rallies and in parliamentary debates, and later became the agents of enormous violence and destruction to the nation during the closing decades of the twentieth century.

According to the archives of the former KGB operative Vasili Mitrokhin, the Soviet secret service had been involved in recruiting agents in Afghanistan since the early 1950s. The agents later helped found the Communist party, known as the PDPA.[24] Among them, Nur Mohammad Taraki was recruited in 1951 with the surprisingly transparent code name Nur. He was invited to the Soviet Union, where he impressed the International Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and received support in his work. On New Year's Day 1965, 14 years later, Taraki presided over the founding congress of what became the PDPA, where a gathering of 27 men elected Nur Mohammad Taraki as secretary general of the Central Committee and Babrak Karmal as deputy secretary general of the party. The party program, which was adopted in the founding congress and published the following year, recommended the formation of a "national democratic front" to carry out progressive reform, which was a veiled manifestation of the party's Marxist-Leninist revolutionary identity, which was adopted at the same time but kept secret.[25] Having become the leader of a "fraternal party," Taraki was removed from the Soviet agent network but maintained secret contacts with the KGB, providing intelligence on Afghanistan and identifying potential agents and operations against US and Chinese embassies in Kabul. He was given subsidies for the PDPA and also a personal allowance and food supplies.[26] Another future leader of the PDPA, Babrak Karmal, was recruited by the KGB in the mid-1950s and given the code name Marid. It is likely he was recruited after his release from jail in 1952. Karmal was viewed by the KGB as more flexible and better educated. Differences soon developed between Taraki and

Karmal, with each complaining bitterly to the KGB about the other. Taraki accused Karmal of having links with the regime intelligence, while Karmal accused Taraki of being corrupt. But the KGB mostly blamed Taraki for the growing split in the PDPA. The differences in the leadership split the party into two factions in the 1960s, with Taraki heading the Khalq (masses) faction, dominated by Pashtuns of rural background, and Parcham (banner) mostly supported by urban Persian speaking followers.

The split annoyed the KGB in Moscow, prompting it to instruct the Kabul residency in 1970s to mediate. “In the course of regular meetings with Marid [Karmal] and Nur [Taraki],” it said,

> you must carefully, in the form of friendly advice and without referring to instructions from Moscow, tell them not to take any step without prior agreement by us which could be used by their enemies as a pretext for striking blow at their groups or compromising them. Marid and Nur should also be warned that they must desist from attacking each other and accusing each other of anti-republican [Daud regime] activities as this plays into the hands of the reactionary forces and will lead to the collapse of the democratic [Communist] movement in Afghanistan.[27]

Apart from some transient reconciliation, the two factions of the party were continuously embroiled in power struggles during their political life through 1992, when they both disintegrated.

Meanwhile, the Islamist movement that had emerged in the 1950s within the academic setting of Kabul University expanded to wider constituencies across the country. The movement was mostly inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which had developed into a mass movement, winning the support of urban youth of educated and deprived backgrounds and the people excluded from political power. The ideology was first imported to Afghanistan by Afghan students returning from graduate religious education in Egypt. One of the vanguards of the movement was Dr. Ghulam Mohammad Niazi, dean of the faculty of Islamic

Sharia (jurisprudence). In reaction to the rise of Marxist activism in the 1960s, the Islamist movement gained momentum in 1960s. In order to contain the spread of the Marxist movement, the Afghan leadership encouraged and facilitated the *ulema* (clerics) in the spring of 1970 to stage protests in Kabul against the Communist ideology. The demonstration of the mullahs in Kabul led to a long sit-in at the main Pul-i-Khishti Mosque in the capital, which turned into an antigovernment rally criticizing the authorities for not taking action against the Communists and for allowing Western culture to influence and undermine the Islamic values of the Afghan society.[28] When the gathering went out of control, the government had to crack down on the assembly and forcefully send the mullahs back to their home provinces.

The Islamist movement at the university, however, continued to grow under the sponsorship of a body of professors spearheaded by Burhanuddin Rabbani, who founded the Jamiat-i-Islami movement, which focused on cultural Islamic education within the student body. With the establishment of the PDPA in January 1965, the Islamic activism took a new turn. A more radical and vocal student branch of the Islamic movement emerged and became increasingly confrontational toward the leftists. The Sazman-i-Jawanan-i Musulman (Organization of Muslim Youth) was led by a student of the Engineering College, Gulboddin Hekmatyar, who also protested against the government for allowing foreign influences into the country's Islamic culture. In 1973, Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan led a successful coup against the king. The coup in 1973 was a setback for the Islamists, since it allied the leftists with the leader of the coup, Mohammad Daud, who banned all parties. The ban drove the Islamists to take cover. It was during this period that some of the Islamist leaders were jailed and others fled the country to Pakistan, where they founded their bases. The movement, however, did not escape division, and in a few

years it split in different factions. It is interesting to note that the Communists rose to power in the next two decades but then disintegrated forever, while the Islamists who had lost in the short term emerged as the most dominant force after the fall of the Communists in Afghanistan.

The 1973 Coup and the End of the Afghanistan Constitutional Monarchy

On July 17, 1973, Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan returned to power after leading a bloodless military coup against his cousin King Zahir Shah, who was traveling in Europe. This ended the monarchy and founded the Republic of Afghanistan under President Daud. The leftists gained an upper hand when a faction of the PDPA known as Parcham led by Babrak Karmal, collaborated with Daud in staging the coup. The coup came 10 years after Daud was forced to resign as prime minister by Zahir Shah—or he may have volunteered to step down in the interest of the democratization of the government. In August 1973 the king abdicated rather than risking an all-out civil war. The forces that helped Daud overthrow the monarchy consisted of three categories of people: the young leftist officers, disillusioned former government officials, and Daud's personal supporters inside and outside the government.

Among these categories, the Parchami Communists, due to their close ties with the Soviet Union and influence within the armed forces, wielded significant power in the new regime and exerted influence over Daud's policy decisions. They made every effort to facilitate the expansion of the relationship with the Soviet Union at the expense of the West. They also spared no efforts to target their archrivals, the Islamists. The government jailed many of their leaders and forced others to flee to Pakistan, where they laid the foundation of the resistance against the secular republican

regime in Kabul. Gulboddin Hekmatyar, Burhanuddin Rabbani, Mawlawi Yunus Khales, and Ahmad Shah Massoud were among the leading figures of Islamists in exile. Just two months after the coup, the former prime minister of Afghanistan, Mohammad Hashim Maiwandwal, was accused of plotting a coup, and he was arrested with a number of other nationalists. Following a staged investigation, the regime announced that Maiwandwal had committed suicide in jail before his trial, but it was widely believed and supported by a great deal of evidence that he was tortured to death. The plot was engineered more by the leftist intelligence and police officers than by Daud himself.[29] Several independent investigative studies have been done inside and outside the country that point to the fallacy of the accusations that led to the brutal punishment of the suspects.

With the return of Sardar Daud Khan to power, the issue of Pashtunistan again found its place on the front burner. Daud had tacitly blamed the monarchy for not seizing the opportunity to exploit Pakistan's political and military weakness after its loss of East Pakistan in 1971 to get a favorable deal with Islamabad on the frontier. The leftist elements in the new regime, with the implicit approval of Moscow (increasing Kabul's dependence on the Soviet Union), pushed the Pashtunistan issue even further at a time when Pakistan was facing insurgency in Baluchistan and had been practically dismembered by the independence of Bangladesh. Afghanistan's irredentist claims were revived, causing increased wariness in Pakistan. In order to preempt Afghanistan's efforts to support the anti-Pakistani insurgency in Baluchistan,[30] the Pakistan prime minister, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, decided to arm the exiled anti-Daud Islamists in Pakistan to cause troubles for Daud and create spheres of influence inside Afghanistan. The Pakistani-trained and -armed insurgents, including the late Ahmad Shah Massoud and fighters affiliated with the former Mujahedin leaders

Burhanuddin Rabbani and Gulboddin Hekmatyar, staged uprisings in July 1975 in the Panjsher Valley and eastern provinces, which were rapidly crushed by the Afghan security forces.

This strengthened the Soviets' hand in their effort to keep Afghanistan dependent on the Soviet Union. Their agents continuously whispered in the ears of Afghan leaders that "you have a potential enemy." The leftists did not have to work hard since Daud himself was known to be an avid supporter of Pashtunistan. In my hour-long, one-on-one meeting with President Daud in the spring of 1974, he spoke with a lot of passion about the Pashtun tribes being "under the yoke" of the Punjabi-dominated Pakistani government through the "sheer use of force." The meeting was not about the future of Pashtunistan. I was called by the *Rahbar* (the Leader), as he was commonly referred to, to discuss the creation of an institute, the equivalent of a defense college, to train and educate senior officials of different government departments on the fundamentals of security and defense strategy in Afghanistan in order to facilitate a whole-government approach to national issues and the development of a national security culture, which the president rightfully saw missing. I was one of a number of professionals that the president had handpicked to teach at the institute, officially named the Institute of Diplomacy. More than three years later, when I met the president in December 1977, for the last time, I found him very sober and willing to diversify the military establishment of Afghanistan through adopting the suitable features and best practices of different nations. He also spoke of the wisdom of working more closely with neighbors and resolving the dispute with Pakistan.

The shifts in Daud's vision and his policies over some five years of his rule marked a major milestone in the recent military history of Afghanistan. They include purging the resolute leftists from the government, asserting his absolute

power as the legitimate president, and freeing the country from its sole dependency on the Soviet Union at the expense of missing other opportunities in its international relations. The purge of selected Parchami Communists from the cabinet and other senior positions in the government began in 1975, right after the failed Pakistan-backed Islamists' rebellion of July 22, 1975. Although the revolt was easily crushed, the leadership of the Islamist movement continued to maintain and operate bases in Pakistan and receive training at Pakistan's special military training center in Chirat. Meanwhile, the defeat of the rebellion resulted in fractures among the Pakistan-based Islamist leaders, splitting the movement into a Hezb-i-Islami party under Gulboddin Hekmatyar, Mawlawi Yunus Khales, and Qazi Amin Waqad and a Jamiat-i-Islami party under Burhanuddin Rabbani. The situation also led to a change in President Daud's thoughts on Pashtunistan in support of resolving the border dispute with Pakistan.

These changes were also supported by policy shifts in both Pakistan and Afghanistan in their relation with the Great Powers. The failure of the US-led SEATO and CENTO pacts to extend the desired assistance to Pakistan during the war of independence of Bangladesh in 1971 (which dismembered Pakistan) drove Prime Minister Bhutto to reconsider his political and military orientation in the 1970s and pursue a balanced foreign policy, including expanding bilateral relations with the Soviet Union. In Afghanistan, a similar reorientation of its foreign policy was initiated by President Daud in order to balance its close ties with the Soviet Union by expanding relations with the West and reaching out to Muslim nations in the Middle East, including Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, Egypt, and others for financial assistance. These events facilitated a rapprochement between Kabul and Islamabad, notably following the reciprocal visits of Bhutto and Daud to each other's countries in 1976–1977.

According to Abdul Samad Ghaus, who accompanied Daud, in his meeting in Kabul with Bhutto in June 1976, the Afghan leader indicated that there were countries, clearly referring to the Soviet Union, "that did not want to see the amelioration of Afghan-Pakistan relations. It was imperative that those quarters be denied the satisfaction of witnessing the worsening of relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan."[31] After Daud's visit in August 1976, relations between the two countries significantly improved. Transit trade moved without any hurdles and even wheat from India's surplus crop was allowed to be transported over land from India to Afghanistan.[32] Consequently, the two leaders were about to reach an agreement on the recognition of the Durand Line in return for Pakistan granting autonomy to the North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan.[33] The impending deal, however, was overtaken by events. In June 1977, a military coup in Pakistan led by General Zia-ul-Haq ended Bhutto's government, and less than a year later President Daud was murdered in a bloody Communist coup.

Daud's weaning away from political and military dependence on the Soviet Union began in earnest in 1976. In the spring of that year, he appointed a commission of senior military professionals to review the Soviet military manuals used in the Afghan army and modify them in accordance with the operational environment and national military traditions of Afghanistan. I headed the secretariat of the group, which brought together dozens of officers to work on manuals related to various arms and branches of service. Although the commission made no significant progress, the exercise alerted the Soviets to the possibility of Kabul parting ways with Moscow. This coincided with the Soviet mediation to reunify the two estranged factions (Khalq and Parcham) of the PDPA Communist Party of Afghanistan in the summer of 1976. This Soviet action worried Daud, who "viewed its purpose as hostile to the Afghan Republic."[34] Meanwhile,

many of the Afghan elite thought that when the Soviet Union intended to invade Afghanistan it would not be through overt military aggression, but rather that it would take place through a military coup by the Communists, which would pave the way for a Soviet incursion.

The Soviet fears of Kabul drifting away from Moscow's influence were confirmed following the stormy meeting between President Daud and General Secretary Brezhnev in Moscow in April 1977, where Daud strongly objected to Brezhnev's complaint about the presence of experts from NATO countries stationed in the northern parts of Afghanistan. Daud bluntly challenged the remarks of his host and, in a decisive tone, reminded him that Afghanistan was a free country and would not allow any nation, including the Soviet Union, to dictate how the country should maintain relations with other states and their advisors. "We will never allow you," he remarked, "to dictate to us how to run our country and whom to employ in Afghanistan. How and where we employ the foreign experts will remain the exclusive prerogative of the Afghan state. Afghanistan shall remain poor, if necessary, but free in its acts and decisions."[35] Another Afghan diplomat, Abdul Jalil Jamili, who was also present at that meeting, related the story to me in a toned-down version but essentially carrying the same message.[36] The assertive position of President Daud was apparently "the last feather that broke the horse's back."

On his return to Afghanistan, President Daud took concrete steps to diversify his ties with the outside world. He publicly announced that "imported ideologies," a reference to Communism, were not what Afghanistan needed. The president signed a military cooperation treaty in Egypt and sent Afghan military and police officers for training there—a country that had adopted the same policy in 1974 to distance itself from the Soviet Union. President Daud decided to build upon the increasing interest of the shah of Iran in Afghanistan's affairs to seek Iranian assistance in funding

Afghanistan's seven-year economic development plan. Signs of increased Iranian interest in Afghanistan were apparent following Mohammad Daud's coup d'état against King Mohammad Zahir Shah in 1973. The new Afghan regime raised fears about Moscow's increased influence in Afghanistan at the expense of the country's traditional neutrality. Encouraged by the United States, the shah's regime in Iran launched a systematic effort to offset Moscow's influence in Afghanistan by expanding economic and political ties with Kabul.[37] Iran offered a two-billion-dollar economic aid program over a ten-year period to Afghanistan. At the same time, Iran participated in channeling covert aid to underground anti-Daud Islamic groups who were fighting the Soviet influence in Afghanistan.[38] Iran's dual-track policy was aimed at blocking the expansion of the Soviet power in the region.[39] During the next few years, the Afghan government clamped down on pro-Moscow leftist elements in the administration, took steps to resolve its long-standing political dispute with Pakistan, and forged closer ties with Iran and some other Islamic countries in the region.[40]

Domestically, Daud consolidated his power by adopting a new constitution that established a single-party government system, the National Revolutionary Party, led by him. A *Loya Jirga*, whose delegates were handpicked by the government, was convened in February 1977 and unanimously elected Daud as president for a seven-year term. Although President Daud excluded committed leftists from the new cabinet, he continued to depend on his close allies in key positions. His purge of Communists was partial, leaving many adherents of the Khalq (masses) and Parcham factions of the PDPA in the armed forces. Meanwhile, disturbed by Daud's independent policies, Moscow stepped up its interaction with Afghan Communist factions, mediating their merger in July 1977—less than a year before the bloody Communist coup against the Daud regime (April 27, 1978). Thus, the Parcham and

Khalq factions, who were previously locked in a power struggle, were reconciled into a unified party. Even before the unification, both factions were separately planning to overthrow the government in military uprisings, for which they had recruited low- and mid-level officers in the army and air force.[41] The PDPA members, mainly the Khalq faction, increased their infiltration into the armed forces, recruiting hundreds of Soviet-trained officers to their ranks. According to some of their leaders, the PDPA had started plotting the coup in 1976, two years before it actually took place.

In order to distract the attention of the regime from their activities, the leftists came up with a carefully crafted deception plan. Their aim was to convince the regime that the real threat to the government was posed by the Islamist elements. The Communist operative inside the security forces even planted weapons and explosives in certain places and then tipped the government to their locations, reporting that the arms belonged to the Islamist groups. This way, the leftists not only shifted the government attention from their conspiracies but also weakened their ideological enemies. Given the failed rebellion staged by Pakistan-backed Islamists in 1975, it did not take the Communist operatives a lot of effort to confuse the government and drive the security forces against the wrong targets.

The April Coup: The Sawr Revolution

On April 27, 1978, a bloody coup staged by Afghan army and air force officers affiliated with the Khalq faction of the PDPA opened the most destructive and violent chapter in Afghanistan’s history, which has yet to close. The chain of events leading up to the coup and the poorly coordinated takeover indicate that it was a last-minute, ad hoc operation. On April 17, 1978, a prominent member of the Parcham

faction of the PDPA, Mir Akbar Khaiber, was assassinated near his home under suspicious circumstances. The Communists accused the government of the murder, charging that President Daud's regime was bent on eliminating them all. There are other speculations that Khaiber was assassinated by the rival Khalqis or elements interested in provoking a confrontation between the Communists and the Daud regime. The funeral of Khaiber turned into a massive antiregime protest and a political statement of defiance.

On April 25, fearing further disturbances and encouraged by staunch anti-Communist elements in his government, Daud ordered the arrest of most of the leaders of the PDPA, including Nur Mohammad Taraki and Babrak Karmal. One of the leading party figures, Hafizullah Amin, who liaised with the army, found time before being detained to issue orders to the Khalqi officers in the army to stage an armed uprising. The party had worked out contingency plans to overthrow the government in a coup. Amin was the custodian of the plan that aimed at staging the coup in August. The arrest of the PDPA leaders pushed the date forward, and Amin sent the plan for immediate execution to Sayed Mohammad Gulabzoy, the contact person for the air force, and to Major Aslam Watan-Jar, the key person in the armored forces.[42]

There are still unanswered questions as to what extent the Soviet Union was involved in the April coup (the *Sawr* Revolution). Most Afghans strongly believe that the Soviet advisors stood behind the armed uprising of the Communist officers in the Afghan army, but there is no hard evidence. The Soviet Union indicated that it was taken by surprise, with Brezhnev learning about it in the press and the chief Soviet military advisor in Afghanistan, General Gorelov, first knowing of the coup when he came to his office in the morning and heard shooting.[43] KGB sources report that the KGB residence in Kabul was given advance warning of the coup by its two Afghan military leaders and Soviet agents,

Mohammad Rafi (code-named Niruz) and Sayed Mohammad Gulabzoy (code-named Mamad). This alarmed the center, which communicated back to the residence on April 26 that the Iranian Intelligence Service (SAWAK) had tricked the PDPA supporters in the armed forces into staging a rebellion that Iran expected would be crushed.[44] According to Alexander Morozov, who served as the deputy KGB chief in Kabul during the months leading up to April 26, Moscow was aware of a plan for a coup and strongly advised against it, but the KGB did not discover until the evening of April 25 that Amin had actually ordered the takeover. But neither Moscow nor the KGB in Kabul took any steps to stop the coup.[45]

Whatever was the role of the Soviet Union in the April coup, it amounted to a response to an unexpected situation in order to prevent the failure of the takeover, which Louis Dupree, who was in Kabul at that time, labeled as "the accidental coup," one, that is, brought on by a series of accidents. "Its outcome," he noted, "was also the result of accidents and makeshift arrangements of spur-of-the-moment action rather than of elaborate planning."[46] Dupree characterized it as "foul-up followed foul-up and the side with the fewer foul-ups won."[47]

But once the coup took place, the Soviet Union could hardly choose to not give it full support. After all, there were over 300 Soviet advisors helping with the technical and ground services at the Afghan air force bases. It is hard to imagine that the pilots could fly the planes without involving their Soviet advisors. The military operation was plagued by blunders on both sides. The hastily prepared and executed military action by the rebels could have been foiled easily by the proper reaction to the initial moves of the plotters, who were controlling only one tank battalion and one squadron of fighter-bombers. It was mostly the failure of the regime's loyal forces, not the power of the coup stagers, that decided

the fate of the fight on the bright spring day of April 27, 1978, in Kabul.

Early that morning, buoyed by the arrest of the Communist Party leaders and the prospects of the end of the Communist activists, the defense minister, Ghulam Haidar Rasuli, ordered army garrisons to hold official celebrations marking the downfall of the “atheist” forces with entertainment and jubilation. With a dangerous disregard for the possible reaction of the leftists in the army, the overconfident commanders encouraged the troops to indulge in festivities, singing, and dancing, while the plotters took advantage of their laxity to take control of key installations, moving tanks and armored personnel carriers (APCs) against the key government points of control. On the other hand, the coup plan called for a simultaneous midday attack on the Arg Palace by both tanks and fighter jets. The armor march on Kabul was initiated by the 4th Armored Brigade, whose chief of staff, Mohammad Rafi, was a PDPA member and was in command of the troops since the brigade commander was out of the country. He managed to mobilize the tank battalions under fellow Communist party members Major Watanjar and Major Mazduryar, topped off the tanks with fuel and ammunition, and by 9:00 AM ordered them to march to downtown Kabul nine miles to the west.

Watanjar led the column, and when he approached the palace, he sent a tank detachment to the Pashtunistan intersection to the south of the palace compound and the Mazduryar unit to the northwest of the sprawling palace enclosure and the residence of Daud and his brother. Watanjar himself took up a posting against the east wall of the palace compound and at midday opened fire on the nearby ministry of defense. The staff ran off in panic.[48] The president was holding a cabinet meeting in the palace, which was disrupted by the attack and broke up. At this point, the air force was expected to appear over the palace and bomb it. But the PDPA officer in charge of the air force plotters,

Colonel Abdul Qader, chief of staff of the Air Force Command, was detained by loyal officers, and the air force action was delayed for five hours. Only when a mechanized detachment moved onto the base from outside, killing many loyal officers and freeing Qader, could the operation resume. Qader flew by helicopter to Bagram, which had been seized by the rebels and the pilots under the command of Qader, and then flew a squadron of combat aircraft that launched air strikes on the palace around 5:00 PM. Half an hour later, an armor detachment broke into the central jail and freed the PDPA leaders—taking them first to the secured radio-TV station and then to the command center of the air force.

During all these tense hours when the palace was under fire from three locations, the military forces around the capital were called repeatedly to rush to the protection of the government, but no troops arrived from the 8th Division based at Qargha, eight miles to the west, or from the 7th Division based at Rishkhor, 10 miles to the south. The Communist operatives within these formations had either joined the coup or neutralized the opposing officers.

The minister of defense rushed to the 8th Division to take control. There he would muster a small force to move against the rebels, but on the way he was abandoned by these troops, who defected to the rebels. He went off to the Central Corps headquarters at the Taj-Beg Palace, where the chief of staff of the corps, General Abdul Ali Wardak, was fighting the renegade detachments from the ground and shooting down one jet fighter. Meanwhile, a regiment from the 7th Division managed to leave Rishkhor in the evening and marched against the rebels, whose ranks were now swelled by their comrades and defectors. The regiment was blocked in the suburbs of Kabul and forced back to Rishkhor. President Daud had also ordered the commanders of the provinces to march to Kabul, but before they could get ready for the move, the fight in Kabul was over. By midnight, when resistance to the coup was waning, the beleaguered army

leadership—including the defense minister, Ghulam Haidar Rasuli; the chief of the general staff, Lieutenant General Abdul Aziz; and the chief of staff of the Central Corps, Brigadier General Abdul Ali Wardak, who were huddled in the Taj Beg Palace—left the headquarters and intended to leave Kabul. They hid for the night in the house of a nearby gardener, who reported their location to the rebels. They were arrested early in the morning and were summarily executed.

In order to stave off any initial popular resistance against the "atheist" Communists, the PDPA leadership decided to announce the victory of the "revolution" in the name of the "Revolutionary Military Council," represented by the air force colonel Abdul Qader and the tank major Aslam Watanjar, who read an announcement at 7:00 PM over Radio Afghanistan in Dari and Pashto declaring the fall of the Daud regime and that the "Council" had taken power.

At the palace, in spite of the heavy bombardment, the Presidential Guard Brigade resisted and destroyed a few BMPs (infantry fighting vehicles). However, due to the sabotage of weapons by Communist operatives within the Presidential Guard Brigade, the resistance waned after several hours. By midnight, Daud instructed the loyal officers to surrender if overwhelmed to avoid unnecessary loss of life.[49] Soon afterward, a detachment of rebel commandos under the command of Lieutenant Imamuddin entered the palace and asked the president, who was surrounded by members of his extended family, to surrender. Daud refused to surrender to the "Communists." His defiance was followed by sweeping fire from the intruders, who massacred Daud and his family, including women and children. Thus the ascendance of the Communists to power began with bloodshed and ushered in a long period of conflict and violence.

On April 30, 1978, the coup leaders set up the Revolutionary Council, which embodied the highest political authority of the state, now named the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA). The same day, Nur Mohammad Taraki was named head of the Revolutionary Council and prime minister, while Babrak Karmal was appointed his deputy in both positions. Hafizullah Amin was given the Foreign Ministry and several military leaders of the coups were put in key cabinet positions. The role played by Amin in setting the coup in motion elevated his position in the government, which he used to consolidate his personal power within the network of Khalqi Pashtun army and police officers. His insatiable ambition for power and his influence over a wide military network prompted Amin first to purge the PDPA of his Parcham rivals, mainly Babrak Karmal, and later to revolt against his "teacher" Nur Mohammad Taraki, paving the way for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan 20 months later.

The Afghan Communists called the April coup the "Great *Sawr* Revolution," which was devoid of any characteristics of a revolution. They even claimed they had "invented" a new path to socialism through arming the military with Marxism-Leninism ideology and using them as an instrument to empower the Communist party, "the vanguard of the working class"—a military coup turned revolution. They also bragged about having thus "enriched" the theory. To the dismay of his Soviet comrades, Taraki claimed that the *Sawr* Revolution was equal in significance with the October Revolution in Russia.[50] The Communist takeover, nevertheless, was a rebellion by the military assets of one faction of the Communist Party with no significant following in the country and no sociopolitical prerequisites of a revolution. In April 1978, the PDPA had about 5,000 members, which increased only to some 11,000 by 1982 (which is considered close to reality despite the inflated official number of 60,000 to 70,000). Further Amin is said to have purged 60 percent of the party, and thus by the time of

his death in December 1979, the number had fallen to between 2,000 and 2,500. The size expanded to 10,000 to 15,000 by 1982. Even accepting the most optimistic of the official accounts, the party made up a tiny sliver, not more than 0.5 percent of the population of Afghanistan.[51]According to the Russian general and military scientist Mahmud Gareev, who also served as advisor to the Afghan president Najibullah from 1989 to 1991, “The April revolution, from the outset did not have any serious social basis and the new power tried to compensate for it with invasive actions into all spheres of social life.”[52]Taraki himself admitted that the party did not command a wide popular base and building such a base would have taken 30 years. So the party reversed the sequence: take power first and then build the supporting base.[53]

The intraparty friction reached its ultimate limits in June 1978, when Taraki and Amin moved against Parcham, purging prominent leaders of the faction. Some were sent into exile as ambassadors, including Babrak Karmal, who was appointed ambassador to Czechoslovakia. Other lesser Parcham figures, including Sultan Ali Keshtmand, Mohammad Rafih, and Abdul Qader, were later arrested on charges of antiregime plotting and sentenced to death, although their sentences were commuted to life in prison after Soviet intervention on their behalf.

The Communists’ Rule

The Communists soon learned firsthand that building a popular base in support of their unpopular ideology was just a dream pipe. With a very small following and the intention to impose an unpopular ideology on a very conservative and religious society, the Communist regime was hardly in a position to expand its support base through persuasion. Taraki was so overconfident and out of touch with the

realities of Afghan society that he told the visiting deputy chief of the KGB, Kryuchkov, in July 1978: “Come back in a year, by which time the mosques [will] be empty.”[54] But what actually happened was the opposite: protesting the attempts to impose alien values on them, most Afghans moved closer to their Islamic faith—a shift that eventually was exploited by the religious parties to influence the political scene. The occupiers were bent on destroying the sociopolitical system that the resistance was trying to preserve.

The regime programs declared in a series of “decrees” over a six-month period sounded progressive but were seen by the people as offensive and disruptive of the norms and values the people believed in. Even the land reform, which amounted to the confiscation of the land for distribution to farmers, was perceived as un-Islamic since it was the acceptance of stolen property. In some cases, the dead bodies of resistance fighters were found along with the land ownership papers distributed to them by the regime. Traditional norms held that the decrees that abolished the customary bride price and canceled debts and mortgages owed by smallholders or landless peasants were un-Islamic and legalized pilfering. The “reform” program not only failed to win the people but further alienated them as it threatened to undermine basic Afghan cultural patterns. The regime’s use of political and military repression to impose the programs antagonized large segments of the population.

Increasing resistance to the PDPA’s unpopular program turned the regime extremely violent, and it resorted to a rule of terror. It attacked the clergy, cracked down on nationalists and democrats, and jailed or executed anyone under the slightest suspicion of intending resistance. The regime imprisoned, tortured, or murdered thousands of members of the traditional elite, the religious establishment, and the intelligentsia. During the first two years of its rule, up to 27,000 people were murdered in the government campaign

of violent repression, and 14,000 to 20,000 more were jailed, mostly at the notorious Pul-i-Charkhi prison. In September 1979, Hafizullah Amin made public a list of 12,000 people who were executed by the regime during the first 18 months of its rule. Other assessments put the number of victims of the regime's terror and mass killing at 50,000 and more.[55]

The nascent Taraki government almost immediately met increased armed opposition as the resistance ranks, embodied by the Mujahedin, grew. The armed resistance to the *Sawr* Revolution has been remarkably consistent with the society's historical models of collective behavior. The combat readiness of the DRA army plunged as government purges swept the officer corps. Soldiers, units, and entire regiments deserted to the resistance, and by the end of 1979, the actual strength of the DRA army was less than half of its authorized 90,000.

The first major uprising occurred in the remote province of Nuristan and, largely uncoordinated, spread throughout all of Afghanistan's provinces. Periodic explosions rocked Kabul and other major cities. By spring 1979, unrest had reached 24 out of 28 Afghan provinces, including major urban areas.

Initially, the Mujahedin were all local residents who took arms and banded together into large, rather unwieldy forces to seize the local district capitals and loot their arms rooms. The DRA countered these efforts where it could, and the Mujahedin began to coalesce into much smaller groups centered on rural villages. These small groups were armed with a variety of weapons, from swords and flintlock muskets to British bolt-action rifles and older Soviet and Soviet-bloc weapons provided to Afghanistan over the years. The guerrilla commanders were usually influential villagers who already had a leadership role in the local area. Few had any professional military experience. Rebellion was widespread but uncoordinated since the resistance was formed along tribal and ethnic lines.

On December 5, 1978, Taraki and the Soviet leader Brezhnev signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation that committed the two countries to a 20-year pact of friendship and cooperation. Article 4 of the treaty justified Soviet intervention in the case of outside armed invasion, and this article was used by the Soviets in 1979 to rationalize their invasion of the country. Although Taraki confirmed that Afghanistan would remain nonaligned, the presence of over 3,000 Soviet advisors posted at all levels of decision making in civilian and military organizations significantly aligned Afghanistan with the Soviet government's political position and its policies.

Then the turning point came in March 1979, when the city of Herat revolted and most of the Afghan 17th Infantry Division mutinied and joined the rebellion. The rebels took over full control of the city for a week before the regime regained control by sending troops from Kabul and using heavy aerial bombardment of the city and the 17th Division. Thousands of people reportedly died in the fighting, including some Soviet citizens. The uprising in Herat was not the first antiregime rebellion in the country where resistance was spreading throughout. But the explosion of violence in Herat shocked the regime to its foundations, and it alarmed Kabul to the extent that Taraki urgently asked the Soviet leaders to send troops to Afghanistan, disguised as Afghans, to prop up the regime, which he claimed was challenged by foreign-backed insurgents. In a telephone conversation with the Soviet premier, Kosygin, on March 17, Taraki insisted on Soviet military intervention. "We ask that you render practical and technical assistance involving people in arms," he said.

> Why can't the Soviet Union send Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Turkmen in civilian clothing? No one will recognize them. We want you to send them. They can drive tanks and because we have all these nationalities in Afghanistan. Let them don Afghan costume, Afghan badges and then nobody will recognize them as foreigners. . . . I suggest that you place Afghan markings on your tanks and aircraft and no one will know. Your troops could advance from the

> direction of Kushka and from the direction of Kabul. In our view no one will be any the wiser. They will think these are Government troops.[56]

The call alarmed the Soviet leaders as much as they were disturbed by the bad news from Afghanistan. Taraki's "oversimplification" of the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan also came to them as shocking. They called the Afghan "comrade" to Moscow, where, on March 20, Kosygin cautioned him about the consequences of the Soviet military intervention in no uncertain terms. "The deployment of our forces in the territory of Afghanistan," he argued,

> would immediately awake the international community and would invite sharply unfavorable multi-pronged consequences. . . . I would again like to underline that the question of deploying our forces has been examined by us from every direction, we carefully studied all aspects of this action and came to the conclusion that if our troops were introduced, the situation in your country would only not improve but would worsen. One cannot deny that our troops would have to fight not only the foreign aggressors but also with a certain number of your people. And people do not forgive such things.[57]

In the following days the Soviet Politburo discussed the situation in Afghanistan, where no support was shown for military intervention. On the basis of these discussions, foreign minister Gromyko, KGB chief Andropov, defense minister Ustinov, and chief of the International Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Boris Ponomarev submitted a policy document on April 1, 1979, which linked the security challenges in Afghanistan to the political and administrative failure of the PDPA leadership. It particularly noted that the party was divided; the government had alienated the clergy, the party ranks, and the army due to its ruthless repression of real and imagined dissent. The document suggested that the regime should broaden its political base and act within the limits of law that protect the rights of the people.[58] The Politburo decided that the Soviet Union should continue to supply weapons and other military equipment, train the Afghan army, and provide economic aid but not send troops to Afghanistan.

The Herat uprising, however, set in motion a slow movement toward a situation nine months later, when the Soviet Politburo saw military intervention in Afghanistan as inevitable. The Soviet Ministry of Defense quietly began preparations for possible combat operations in Afghanistan. As early as April 1979, the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Defense Ministry (GRU) ordered the creation of a special-purpose battalion based in Tashkent that would consist of Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Turkmens who were ethnically and linguistically similar to the Afghan nationals settled immediately across the border in Afghanistan. The 154th Separate Spetsnaz Detachment, known as the "Muslim Battalion," consisting of 500 soldiers, would stand up in two months under the command of Major Khalbaev. The members of the battalion were handpicked from across the Soviet Union, and each soldier was expected to be skilled in more than one specialty. The battalion was equipped by two mobile self-propelled antiaircraft guns (*Shilka*), which were also used against ground targets.

Meanwhile, the KGB set up a small Spetsnaz (special purpose force) detachment modeled on Western commando units such as the British SAS and the US Rangers. Code-named Zenith, the detachment was sent to Kabul under the command of Colonel Boyarinov. The unit was housed in the Soviet embassy compound in Kabul and was tasked with protecting the embassy and the senior members of the mission.

In spite of the Politburo's decision in April not to send troops to Afghanistan, elements of the 5th and 108th Motorized Rifle Divisions were given orders to begin moving toward the Afghan border under the cover of a training exercise. This was followed by the visit of General Yepishev, the chief of the Main Political Department of the Defense Ministry, to Kabul to assess the situation and offer advice to the Afghan "comrades." Ten years earlier, the general had made a similar visit to Czechoslovakia prior to the invasion in

1968. Yepishev promised assistance but rejected Taraki's and Amin's renewed requests for Soviet troops. Meanwhile, the presence of Soviet "advisors" in Afghanistan gradually increased over the summer; Soviet aircraft frequented the Bagram air base; and Russian pilots flew Afghan helicopter missions. Later in August 1979, General Pavlovski, commander in chief of Soviet ground forces, who had commanded the invasion force in Czechoslovakia in 1968, led a group of some 60 officers on a multiweek assessment tour of Afghanistan. The Soviet delegation reviewed the Afghan tactical manuals and training programs, making changes in response to the requirements of the actual Afghan battlefield. During its stay in Afghanistan, which lasted until October 22, 1979, the Soviet delegation also made a thorough reconnaissance of Afghanistan, the capacity of its armed forces, and the level of the PDPA's influence in the country as well as the strength and weaknesses of the resistance forces.

Meanwhile, during the spring and summer of 1979, antiregime uprisings spread across the country, including Kabul. On April 20, the DRA soldiers and the PDPA operatives massacred over 1,200 villagers, including children and old men, at Kirhala near Asadabad, the center of Kunar Province, in response to a Mujahedin attack in the area. In May, people rebelled in at least six provinces, including Kabul. In the next month, on June 23, the Shi'a community of the Chindawal District in Kabul city made a bold show of force, attacking a police station in the city and seizing weapons from the government arsenal. The uprising was brutally crushed by sheer force, including the use of helicopter gunships. Similar mass killings took place in Kandahar, Uruizgan, Badakhshan, Bamian, Herat, and many other provinces. On July 11, the resistance forces in the Panjsher Valley staged a massive uprising along the length of the valley and seized full control of the district. The valley was never fully occupied by regime forces, although it later established isolated posts at key

points. On July 20, the Mujahedin briefly occupied Gardez, the center of Paktia Province, and two weeks later a commando battalion at Bala-Hissar of Kabul mutinied and was crushed by ground and air attacks. Just a week afterward, part of the 11th Division based in Jalalabad rose up in arms and, after killing some of their Communist colleagues, joined the Mujahedin.[59] In mid-October, the rebellion hit the regime closer to home, when a group of officers in the 7th Infantry Division (based in Rishkhor, on the outskirts of the capital) staged a rebellion. Amin used excessive ground force and heavy air strikes to crush the uprising. A week later, another major blow to the regime came when, on October 22, 1979, the Asmar Mountain Brigade commander, Abdur Rauf Safi, defected with his entire brigade to the Mujahedin, after killing the Kunar governor and the Communist officers in the brigade.[60]

By early September, the KGB assessment indicated that the Taraki-Amin government was losing authority and their repressive policies and their insistence on a military solution to a political problem were driving more and more people into the resistance ranks. The KGB widely believed that Amin was the main obstacle in the way of moderating the regime and thus favored Karmal's Parcham faction. On the other hand, the Soviet military was more sympathetic to the Khalq faction since the majority of officers in the armed forces were affiliated with Khalq. Amin's massive use of terror was becoming a source of increasing concern to the Soviet leadership. Further, Amin's rumored connection with US intelligence during his education at Columbia University in the late 1950s was played up by his rivals in the party and their Soviet supporters. Other reports, however, indicated that during his studies in Columbia, Amin was attracted to Marxism, and in 1958 he became a member of the university's Socialist Progressive Club.

At the end of summer 1979, the leadership situation within Kabul saw dramatic shifts that eventually convinced Moscow

that Amin must go. In order to consolidate his power, Amin demoted four close allies of Taraki, including Minister of Defense Aslam Watanjar, Minister of the Interior Sherjan Mazduryar, Minister of Communications Sayed Mohammad Gulabzoy, and the head of state security (AGSA), Assadullah Sarwari, whom he referred to as the "gang of four." Amin took over the Ministry of Defense and, in the absence of Taraki, who was out of the country attending the nonaligned conference in Havana (September 1–11), took the opportunity to further pursue his intrigues. On his return from Havana, Taraki stopped over in Moscow to listen to another lecture from Brezhnev and top Soviet leaders about the need to clean up his act. They tacitly blamed Amin for the division in the party. While in Moscow, Taraki also met with Karmal, who was brought there for the purpose, and the two men discussed issues related to the reunification of the PDPA. The talks in Moscow were reported to Amin by his men who were part of Taraki's delegation.

The KGB warned Taraki about Amin's plots against him but he dismissed the concerns. Two days after Taraki's return to Kabul on September 11, a clash between Taraki and Amin's security details at the palace deepened the rift between the top Afghan Communist leaders. The violence happened while Amin was going to meet Taraki. Amin accused his boss of plotting to kill him and ordered his supporters in the armed forces to surround the palace and arrest Taraki. Taraki's loyal ministers failed to win the support of the army commanders. Taraki was arrested and, on September 16, the PDPA plenum ousted him from the party and stripped away his official positions. The plenum then "elected" Hafizullah Amin as the general secretary of the party and the chairman of the Revolutionary Council. The "gang of four" went underground and eventually came under the protection of the KGB in Kabul. They were spirited out of the country on September 18 to Eastern Europe in a clandestine operation called Raduga (rainbow). The ministers, except Mazduryar, were

given Soviet passports and were shipped out as air cargo in specially prepared containers from the Bagram airbase.[61]

These events took place so rapidly that the Soviet "comrades" were unable to prevent them, although they made a few attempts. On September 15, the Soviet Politburo met to chart out the strategy of how to react to Amin's usurpation of power. While they deplored the way Amin ousted Taraki, the Soviet leadership decided to continue to work with Amin, but on a reduced level. In the following weeks, the situation changed as Amin began criticizing his Soviet benefactors and allegedly moved to improve relations with the West. The murder of Taraki by Amin on October 8 shifted the mood in Moscow and marked a fateful turning point in Soviet policy. They now favored regime change in Afghanistan with possible military intervention to remove Amin and replace him with a malleable leader.

By the fall of 1979, the KGB chief, Andropov, was convinced that Afghanistan was drifting away from the ideological orbit, as it was threatened, like Czechoslovakia some 11 years earlier, with "ideological sabotage," and only Soviet military intervention could reverse the course. On October 25, the KGB sent one of its experienced agents, Alexander Petrov, who from 1972 to 1978 was stationed in Kabul under the cover of being the TASS News correspondent, to Prague to discuss with Karmal his chosen role as the Afghan leader in waiting. On October 30, Karmal wrote a personal letter to Brezhnev, condemning Amin as an anarchist and claiming that "the leading members of the party [the PDPA] are prepared to organize and unite Communists, patriots, and all the progressive and democratic forces of Afghanistan. The achievement of these aims will be assisted by the fraternal assistance, consultation and advice of our Soviet friends."[62]

After meeting with Babrak Karmal and other exiled PDPA figures who were brought by the KGB to Moscow in early

November,[63] Andropov wrote to Brezhnev that “in order to carry out their political program, the healthy forces of the PDPA intend to come to power by overthrowing the regime. A military committee to plan the military and political operation to eliminate Amin has been set up.” He indicated that it would be “a rapid military operation in the capital.”[64] This was followed by another letter from Andropov to Brezhnev in early December reporting “alarming information about Amin’s secret activities, forewarning of a possible shift to the West,” which would result in both the end of Communist rule and a catastrophic loss of Soviet influence. Brezhnev finally supported the introduction of Soviet military forces in Afghanistan.

The preliminary plan to invade Afghanistan in support of a regime change was made by a narrow circle of the Politburo members[65]presided over by Leonid Brezhnev on December 8, 1979, with the aim of removing Hafizullah Amin with KGB special agents and installing Babrak Karmal in his place in Kabul. Ustinov shared the plan two days later with the chief of general staff, Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, and ordered him to prepare approximately 75,000 to 80,000 troops for the “temporary” introduction of Soviet troops into Afghanistan. Calling the move “reckless,” the marshal strongly objected to the decision, arguing that this size force would be unable to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan. Citing the Afghans’ traditions of acting strongly against foreign forces on their land, he warned about the possible involvement of Soviet troops in military operations. The argument failed to change the plan but merely put it on hold pending a final decision—which did not take long anyway. Meanwhile, orders were issued to start preparing the troops.[66]

On December 12, the Politburo, presided over by Brezhnev, with members Suslov, Grishin, Kirilenko, Peltshe, Ustinov, Chernenko, Andropov, Gromyko, Tikhonov, and Ponomarev in attendance, unanimously approved a plan presented by the

“magnificent three” (Andropov, Gromyko, Ustinov) to introduce Soviet troops into Afghanistan. It was code-named Measures. The protocol of the session, handwritten by Chernenko, remained a supersecret, and for a long time it was not accessible even to those among the highest leadership, until the declassification of the document following the breakup of the Soviet Union.[67]

The Plan for the Regime Change

The plan for regime change was initially a KGB clandestine scheme aimed at removing Amin without using major forces openly. On December 6, the Politburo endorsed a proposal by Andropov and Marshal Ogarkov to send a detachment of 500 men to Kabul—the so-called Muslim Battalion comprising Central Asians—disguised as Afghans. Their presence would be explained as fulfilling Amin’s request to deploy Soviet forces by sending a Soviet battalion to protect Amin’s new residence at the Tajbeg Palace, on the southwest outskirts of Kabul. This was the first military deployment directly connected to possible operations against Amin. The Muslim Battalion was airlifted from its camp in Uzbekistan and moved on December 9 and 10 to the Soviet airbase in Bagram,[68]from where it was deployed to Amin’s presidential palace.

The initial KGB plan, not shared with the top Soviet military advisor in Afghanistan, General Magametov, was that the Parchamites, led by Babrak Karmal, would oust Amin in a coup with the support of the Soviet troops already deployed in Afghanistan. The KGB had succeeded in infiltrating an ethnic Azerbaijani agent, Mutlin Agaverdioglo Talybov (code-named Sabir), into the kitchens of Amin’s presidential palace, where he was employed as chef. Sabir was fluent in Afghan languages and was under orders to poison Amin. On December 13, Babrak and Anahita Ratebzad, a leading

female member of the Parcham leadership, were secretly flown into Bagram to join Watanjar, Gulabzoy, and Sarwari, who had been brought there a few days earlier. According to a Zenith Group officer, Karmal, Sarwari, and Gulabzoy were seen by him in Bagram before December 13.[69] Four days later Sabir's first attempt to poison Amin failed, as Amin was extremely careful in his eating habits—often switching foods. Instead his son-in-law Assadullah Amin, who was the head of the State Intelligence Administration, Kargari Estekhbrati Mo'assesa (KAM), fell ill with acute food poisoning and was flown to Moscow for urgent medical treatment. Karmal and his team were forced to fly back from Bagram to the Soviet Union and wait for another attempt.

When the military found out about the KGB-led regime-change plan, it strongly objected to it on the ground that such an operation could not be carried out successfully without a strong military backup. This postponed the operation as the size of an acceptable military contingent was debated between the Soviet military and political authorities. Given the experience of the Czechoslovakia invasion in 1968 in cracking down on reformist trends in Prague, a far greater force was envisioned to implement the political plan. In 1968, the armies from four Warsaw Pact countries—the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Poland, and Hungary—numbering 200,000 troops and 2,000 tanks invaded Czechoslovakia. The KGB believed that 35,000 to 40,000 troops would be able to do the job while the military called for a larger force. Eventually, the initial military contingent that invaded the country was set at 85,000 troops. The model used in that invasion of Czechoslovakia was also recommended for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, although the situation in Afghanistan was different from that of Czechoslovakia. In Afghanistan the resistance was mainly based in the rural areas and unlikely to break by seizing the cities, while the uprising in Czechoslovakia was mainly urban in nature.

Decision for Military Invasion

Once the decision to introduce Soviet forces into Afghanistan was made, preparations for the operation were stepped up. The concept of the operation was to eliminate Amin by a coup de main and replace him with Babrak Karmal. In order to consolidate the regime change, Soviet ground and air assets were to deploy in Afghanistan to seize control of key cities and the communication network. The invasion force was primarily the newly constituted 40th Army based out of the Turkistan Military District (TMD) and commanded by General Tukharinov, the deputy commander of the TMD. In order to direct the army's operation, a Ministry of Defense operational group under Marshal Sokolov, first deputy minister of defense, was established at Termez on December 14, 1979.[70] The 40th Army, named the Limited Contingent of Soviet Forces in Afghanistan (LCSFA), initially consisted of the 5th and 108th Motorized Rifle divisions, the 103rd Airborne Division, the 860th Separate Motorized Rifle Regiment, the 56th Separate Air Assault Brigade, the 345th Separate Parachute Regiment, the 2nd Air Defense Brigade, and the 34th Composite Aviation Corps. The airborne elements were to fly in and help the in-place Spetsnaz units take the city of Kabul and the main airfields. The ground elements were intended to move over land on the eastern and western axes to occupy key towns and lines of communication corridors. Amin's continued request for Soviet troops to prop up his beleaguered regime facilitated the planning process and the deployment of the Soviet troops.

From the April coup to the invasion, the PDPA and the Afghan government were under the strict control of their Soviet advisors.[71] Further, the Kabul regime's previous requests to Moscow to send troops to Afghanistan helped the invasion enormously. On the eve of the movement of the Soviet army, the Soviet ambassador in Kabul informed Amin

that his government had decided to extend assistance to Afghanistan, and accordingly Amin ordered the Afghan general staff to cooperate in the operation. Early on December 25, as Soviet engineer units were building pontoon bridging on the Amu Darya River near Termez, the 40th Army commander, General-Lieutenant Tukharinov, met with the chief of operations of the DRA general staff, General Baba Jan, in Kunduz, Afghanistan, to coordinate the deployment of the Soviet forces.

On the order of the Soviet defense minister, Ustinov, the 40th Army began crossing the Afghan border around 3:00 PM on the same day (Christmas Day). The first battalion from the 108th Division crossed the river, leading the division into Afghanistan on the eastern corridor. The 5th Division would begin crossing onto the western corridor later. At the same time, the 103rd Airborne Division began flying into Kabul. The 108th Motorized Rifle Division completed its march on December 27 and concentrated in the area of Baghlan, Kunduz, Puli-Khumri, and Doshi. The following day the division was ordered to march to Kabul.[72] Meanwhile, the 103rd Airborne Division and the 345th Separate Parachute Regiment were flown by transport aircraft to Kabul and Bagram airfields. The air transport operation took a total of 343 flights and 47 hours to deploy the paratroopers and their vehicles and equipment. Disturbed by the noise of two days of overflights, the Kabul citizens were told that due to flooding at the Amu Darya ports, the necessary cargo had to be delivered through air transport.[73] During the operation, only one plane crashed, killing all thirty-seven paratroopers and the seven-man crew. After landing, the 103rd Division, with the concurrence of the Afghan side, deployed forces at key installations in the capital. The main roads of Kushka, Herat, Shindand, Girishk, Kandahar, Termez, Kabul, Kabul-Jalalabad, Pul-e Khomri, Kunduz, and Faizabad were put under Soviet security.

Two days later, on the night of December 27, the Soviet 5th Motorized Rifle Division crossed the border at Kushka in the west, and by the following day its regiments were in control of Herat and Shindand, with its area of responsibility extending to Kandahar.

Soviet Invasion Routes, December 1979.

Operation Storm 333

The other key part of the plan was a coup de main to eliminate Amin and his regime, replacing it with an

alternative government under Babrak Karmal, as the motorized rifle divisions were moving toward their destinations in Afghanistan. The primary strike force for the purpose included KGB Spetsnaz forces already in Kabul and Bagram, advance units of the 345th Separate Parachute Regiment, and Soviet military advisers serving in Kabul. Their operation aimed at seizing 13 key targets in the capital, including the Amin residence at Tajbeg Palace, the Central Committee of the PDPA headquarters, the Ministries of Defense, Interior, Foreign Affairs, and Communications, the general staff of the armed forces, the headquarters of the Central Army Corps, the State Intelligence Agency (KAM) building, the prison full of political prisoners in Pul-e Charkhi, the radio and television center, the central post office, and the central telegraph office. Simultaneously, the Soviets planned to prevent DRA troops from deploying in the city.

The elements assigned to storm the Amin residence consisted of the so-called Muslim Battalion (520 men), deployed wearing Afghan army uniforms and incorporated into the presidential security forces, guarding the outer perimeter of Amin’s residence; the KGB Zenit and Grom detachments (41 men) deployed in Kabul; and a company from the 345th Airborne Regiment (70 men). The total assault force numbered about 630 men. The plan was that the Amin residence was to be stormed by the Zenit troops and a company of the Muslim Battalion. The assault was planned by the senior GRU representative in Kabul, Colonel Kozlov, and it required neutralizing and containing the security forces of the Amin residence (the Guard Brigade) and inserting the assault elements into the palace to kill Amin and the security details inside the building. All elements carried out thorough reconnaissance, surveying the palace defensive layout and the floor plan of the main building. On the same day, Babrak Karmal and his team were brought by the 103rd Airborne Division to the Soviet embassy and were moved to Bagram. While preparations for

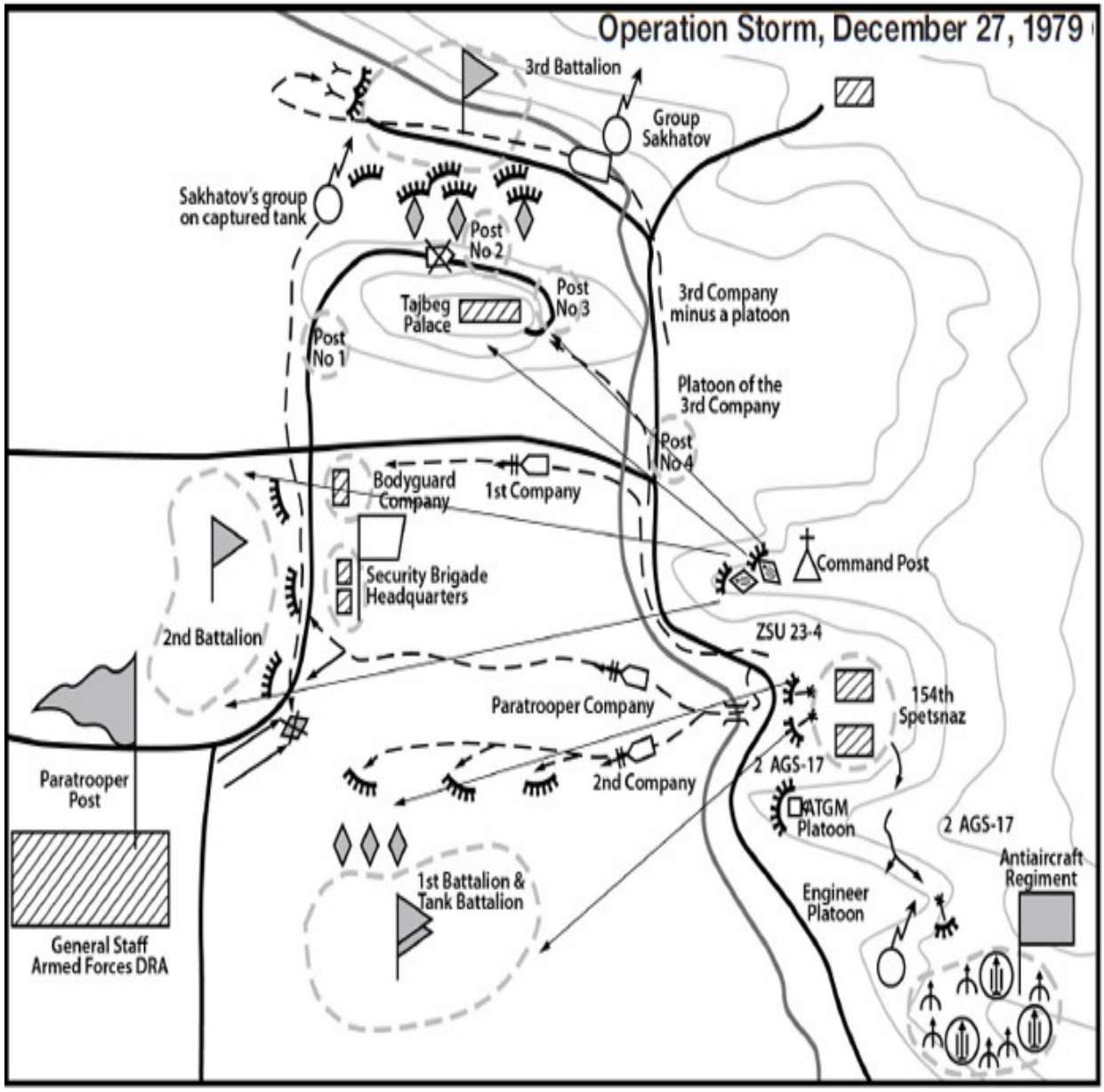
the assault was underway, Amin was in total ignorance of what was about to happen. He was holding a dinner party at his residence for top members of the party and government. A second attempt by the KGB-planted chef to poison or drug Amin caused many of the guests to fall ill, including Amin, who went into a coma but was saved by Afghan and Soviet doctors who were urgently called to the palace.[74] Kryuchkov, the deputy KGB chief, later maintained that the substance was no more than a powerful sleeping draught.[75]

The “H” hour for launching the assault on the palace, code-named Storm 333, was changed several times. The signal to move out was a major explosion aimed at destroying the communications center in downtown Kabul. At 6:00 PM, General Magametov ordered Colonel Kozlov to initiate the operation as soon as he could without waiting for the explosion. Twenty minutes later, a special team moved out to neutralize three dug-in tanks that covered the approaches to the palace. When the tanks were secured, the team fired two red rockets at 7:15 PM to signal the beginning of the assault. The assault group’s Shilka antiaircraft guns opened fire on the solid walls of the palace, while two companies of the Muslim Battalion and the paratrooper company blocked and contained the three infantry and the tank battalions of the Presidential Guard Brigade in their barracks.[76] Under the cover of the Shilka guns, infantry fighting vehicles (BMPs) carrying the third company of the Muslim Battalion, as well as the Zenit and Grom Spetsnaz teams under the command of Colonel Boyarinov, rushed to the palace. They were instructed to stop at nothing, take no prisoners, and secure the building at any cost. The Zenit group in four APCs (BTR) drove to the western side of the palace, while the Grom in five BMPs dismounted at the front entrance of the palace on the east. The assault teams entered the building from eastern and western sides through the doors and windows, killing any moving target through the dim and dark corridors

of the palace. The operation lasted 43 minutes, during which Amin was killed along with some 200 of his security troops. The Afghan forces stopped their resistance once they learned that the attackers were the Soviets, not Afghan mutineers as they initially assumed. Amin's body was lying at the bar, and after Watanjar and Gulabzoy confirmed its identity, it was wrapped in a carpet for burial at a secret place. Over 100 of the KGB Special Forces members were killed or wounded in the assault.[77] The assault force commander Colonel Boyarinov was among the killed.

While the assault on Amin's residence was going on, elements of the 103rd Guards Airborne Division seized control of all the key political and military targets in Kabul and the surrounding areas and sealed the gates of the capital to prevent the possible advance of Amin loyalists. At 8:45 PM, the recorded speech of Babrak Karmal, heralding the demise of the Amin regime and his rise to power, was broadcast supposedly by Radio Kabul but actually from the advance Soviet Headquarters at Termez. Karmal stayed in Bagram on December 27 and was brought into Kabul the following day with a tank escort. During the next five days, he lived at KGB safe houses in the capital.

By mid-January the main elements of the 40th Army were in place in Afghanistan: the 108th and 5th Motorized Rifle Divisions, the 103rd Airborne Division, the 56th Separate Air Assault Brigade, the 860th Separate Motorized Rifle Regiment, and the 345th Parachute Assault Regiment. A fourth division, the 201 Motorized Rifle Division, and two separate motorized rifle brigades (the 66th and 70th) were added to the 40th Army later.[78]



Operation Storm, December 27, 1979.

Following a two-month consolidation period, the Soviet forces launched a major military operation in the Kunar Province in early March 1980 with the aim of clearing the valley of Mujahedin and sealing off the infiltration routes across the border. The move was the first test of the Soviet strategic expectation that the bulk of the expeditionary forces would be able to return after consolidating the

authority of the new Moscow-installed regime in Kabul. The Soviet military formations, however, soon found themselves heavily engaged with numerous Mujahedin groups, forcing them to fight for every village.

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10 Soviet Occupation and the War of Resistance

1979–1989

Soviet military historians assert that the Soviet invasion was defensive in nature and aimed at ending a “chaotic situation” in the Soviet Union’s immediate neighborhood. If this was the goal, the invasion further intensified the “chaos,” expanding the conflict into wider regional and global dimensions and contributing to the breakup of the Soviet Union. The Soviets’ nurturing of leftist forces in Afghanistan during the Cold War since the early 1950s and their continued support of the propagation of Marxist-Leninist ideology led into a situation that eventually enticed Moscow into the quagmire of the Afghan battlefield.

The stated immediate objective of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was to prop up a falling Afghan Communist regime in the face of ever-increasing resistance. Many indications point to the fact that, in working out the strategic-operational missions to crush the Afghan resistance, the Soviets had overestimated the power and political base of their Communist allies in Afghanistan while underrating the strength, dimension, and strategic potential of the Afghan resistance. The Soviet leadership optimistically expected that once Hafizullah Amin was forcibly removed from power, the situation in Afghanistan

would stabilize as the Soviet expeditionary force secured the urban centers and Soviet political advisers directed the newly installed regime of Babrak Karmal to moderate government policies and broaden the popular base of his administration. They hoped this would pave the way for the withdrawal of the Soviet forces after the Afghan government gained control. Soon after the invasion, however, it became obvious to the foreign troops that an early, responsible extrication from Afghanistan was unlikely, and the Soviet military became entangled in fighting the increasing resistance of the Afghan people. Nor did the Soviet's new man in Kabul live up to Moscow's expectations. Instead of unifying the PDPA, the new masters in Kabul launched a campaign of revenge against their rival faction in the Party —the *Khalqis*. Even in the early stages of the occupation, some senior Soviet military leaders, such as General Alexander Maiorov, the chief military advisor in Afghanistan, came to view the war in Afghanistan as unwinnable. He felt that Babrak Karmal was a weak person and often drunk. He suggested that Karmal should be replaced and that the Soviet Union should withdraw its forces as soon as it could.[1]

Even Karmal's KGB supporters became disillusioned. The KGB in Kabul reported that Karmal had developed an absurd sense of self-importance, claiming to be a major world statesman of even greater stature than Fidel Castro. Yet at the same time, Karmal was plagued with self-doubt, found it difficult to make decisions, and had begun to drink heavily.[2] This had become a major problem as the top Soviet advisor in Afghanistan, General Maiorov, reported that he had to "order" an intoxicated Karmal to stop drinking vodka during a serious meeting.[3] Nepotism and favoritism toward friends and relations were reportedly rife within the party leadership. Karmal justified his purge within the PDPA and complained to his Soviet advisors: "As long as you keep my hands bound and do not let me deal with the *Khalq* faction,

there will be no unity in the PDPA, and the government cannot become strong. There can be no organic unity as long as there are *Khalqis* in the Party. They tortured and killed us. They still hate us. They are the enemies of unity."[4]

Nor was the DRA army a viable asset. The force looked formidable on paper only. Its prewar authorized strength of 90,000 was continuously depleted following the Communist coup in April 1978. The units' personnel were significantly reduced due to purges, mutinies, desertion, and defection to the antiregime armed opposition. According to KGB accounts, 17,000 Afghan soldiers deserted within four months of the Soviet invasion. In 1981, 30,000 more deserted, and at least the same number did so in 1982.[5] All units dropped below their nominal strength, the reduction in some cases being tenfold. For example, a division may have had only 1,000 combat personnel instead of its 10,000 authorized strength. Similarly, the personnel strength of regiments declined to battalion size and battalions to company level. Except for the officers and noncommissioned officers, the rank and file comprised conscript soldiers called up twice a year for two years of service. The desertion between the call-up times made it difficult to refill the gaps in the ranks. Thus, the army resorted to drastic measures by extending the term of service of serving soldiers and "arresting" service-eligible men in the street or at home during "press-gang" sweeps to supply men to the army. However, these unwilling recruits would escape at the first opportunity, turning the recruitment process into a revolving door. Many deserters would flee with weapons and join the ranks of the Mujahedin fighters.

The international reaction to the Soviet invasion was wide, loud, and clear, condemning it as a blatant and unprovoked aggression. Over time it translated into increasing moral and material support of the Afghan resistance against the

Soviet occupation. The UN Security Council and General Assembly continuously condemned the aggression and called for the immediate withdrawal of foreign military forces from Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the antiregime insurgency grew and developed into a nationwide uprising. Andropov's extraordinary miscalculation of forcing stabilization in Afghanistan with the Soviet army was shattered by the massive protests in Kabul during February 20–23, 1980, when thousands of Kabul citizens shut down the city and attacked the Soviet-installed government targets across town. This came after a weeklong passive protest, where Kabul residents chanted "*Alah-u-Akbar*" (God is the greatest) from their rooftops for hours at night. This symbolic defiance was commonly referred to as the "*Alah-u-Akbar*" demonstration nights. The uprising was quelled by 2,000 Soviet and more than 1,000 Afghan troops, 73 tanks, 240 armored personal carriers, and 207 sorties by Soviet and Afghan aircraft flying low over the city and its outskirts. The KGB reported that 900 demonstrators were arrested.[6]

Phases of the War

In hindsight, the Russian General Staff categorized the Soviet political-military campaign into four phases. It defined the first phase (December 1979–February 1980) as the introduction of Soviet forces into Afghanistan to secure the main cities and communication corridors in order to prop up the new Moscow-backed regime in the country. During this period the 40th Army, with nearly 52,000 troops, was involved only in security missions with no major offensive operations. The second phase lasted from March 1980 to April 1985 (ending just after the elevation of Mikhail Gorbachev to the party leadership in the Soviet Union). Most of the combined military operations were planned and carried out during this phase.

The short period of the third phase extended from April 1985 to April 1986, when the Soviet occupation army reached the peak of its strength, including four divisions, five separate brigades, four separate regiments, six separate battalions with 6,000 tanks and other armored vehicles, and four aviation and three helicopter regiments in Afghanistan, numbering 108,800 personnel, with 73,000 in combat units. This phase was the year of decision, when the Soviets allegedly attempted to win the war militarily through the escalation of combat action, making it the bloodiest year of the occupation. During this phase a symbolic withdrawal of six regiments took place, reducing the 40th Army by 15,000 personnel, 55 tanks, and 200 infantry fighting vehicles (BMPs) and armored personnel carriers. The Soviets claim that the regiments were three air defense regiments, a tank regiment, and two motorized rifle regiments. Western sources indicate that these were probably the air defense and tank regiments of the 5th, 108th, and 201st Motorized Rifle Divisions–forces that were not needed for guerrilla war.[7]

The fourth phase opened in May 1986, when Najibullah replaced Babrak Karmal as the head of the PDPA and ended with the complete withdrawal of the Soviet army from Afghanistan on February 15, 1989. During this phase, the Afghan government, under the new leader, Najibullah, made attempts to replicate the Gorbachev glasnost policy in order to broaden the popular base of the Kabul regime through a policy of reconciliation and of coopting some Mujahedin field commanders and in order to Afghanize the conflict.[8]

But as I followed the situation throughout the conflict, the war was fought in four different strategic phases: the Soviet offensive operation in support of the regime change; a symmetrical expansion of the war leading to a strategic stalemate following the failure of the Soviet forces to win militarily; the Soviets' combined political-military struggle

aimed at a political solution in support of a responsible exit strategy; the Soviet military defeat and its withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The most striking issue that transpired through the events of over nine years of violent occupation was the lack of Soviet political and military preparedness for the Afghan war, despite Moscow's close ties with the country for a quarter of a century. This omission, coupled with risky miscalculations about the "correlation of forces and means," haunted the Soviet campaign all the way to the end. Nor was the Soviet military machine able to meet the requirements of fighting an irregular war on rugged terrain. The troops had no practical skills in the conduct of counterinsurgency warfare, nor did they possess specific guidelines and theoretical manuals for fighting such a war. The army had insufficient combat readiness to fight in mountainous terrain. According to General Gromov, the last commanding general of the Soviet army in Afghanistan, many motorized rifle soldiers were unfit for operating in the tough mountainous terrain. In one combat action, under the pressure of fatigue and heat, the mortar crews simply threw away the heavy parts of their 82 mm mortar—ending up with one mortar out of three with which the unit began the battle.[9] Such statements invalidate the prewar notions suggesting that the Soviet military methodology had something of a legendary resourcefulness. An army reputed to have developed creative methods for the tactical and operational employment of their armed forces under various conditions in different theaters of military action (TVD) had hardly digested the lessons from the Basmachi war in Central Asia (1919–1933) or the counterinsurgency war in Vietnam.

Therefore, an army structured for large-scale, high-tempo engagements failed to deal effectively with decentralized guerrilla fighters who were too elusive to be destroyed or

“softened up” by the weight of massive air and artillery “preparations” or finished off by the swift and bold maneuvers of armored and mechanized columns. The Soviet command had to make adjustments as the conflict wore on. The modification was slow and incremental, allowing the Mujahedin to adjust their fighting methods as well. However, the shifts dictated by the battle situations mostly affected the committed forces and failed to bring significant conceptual changes. This is clearly visible in the arguments offered by the postconflict Russian authors when they describe the application of Soviet operational art to the Afghan guerrilla war setting, which was basically dominated by tactical actions.

The Political and Geopolitical Context of the War

During the years of occupation, the war in Afghanistan evolved within a changing political and geopolitical context that shaped the course of military developments in and around Afghanistan. The political context of the war was influenced by internal, regional, and global reactions to the Soviet invasion and its occupation of Afghanistan in the face of increasing resistance by the Afghans and their outside allies.

Domestically, four distinct trends shaped the political context of the struggle. First, the Soviet occupation widened the base of the Afghan resistance and pitted the overwhelming majority of the Afghan nation against the Soviet military and the Moscow-installed Kabul regime and its army. In contrast to previous foreign invasions, when the integrated contingents of civilian militias and elements of the fragmented state armies of Afghanistan fought foreign invaders, this war split the nation in two. The polarization

was increasingly intensified, as each side was symmetrically supported by its foreign backer.

Second, the unprecedented violence and war-related destruction changed the fabric of the traditional society in Afghanistan. The massive displacements ushered in a state of social and political transformation that could no longer handle the war using society's traditional models, in which tribes and communities fought while maintaining their socioethnic cohesiveness in their solidarity space. The politicization of the resistance split social communities along ideological lines, while ideologies failed to resist ethnic divisions. Internally traditional society was split along different party lines (both Communists and Mujahedin factions), and externally it became polarized through its affiliation with the international competition of the Cold War system. This resulted in the factionalization of the resistance and the emergence of new local leaders with access to outside resources who challenged the authority of the traditional elite. The traditional centers of sociopolitical authority included the formal authorities (the government) and the traditional authorities (tribes, big landowners, local chiefs, and the clergy). It was disrupted by the emergence of a third, war-instigated center of authority, as a derivative power, which was empowered and funded by outside actors and their internal surrogates. These shifts tore the society apart and fueled power struggles between the new elite once the occupation ended.

Third, the violent occupation of the country forced the people to migrate from the Soviet-controlled cities to areas under the Mujahedin control and across the border to Pakistan, Iran, and beyond. The massive displacement helped widen the constituency of Mujahedin, underpinning the popular struggle with the Islamic duties of *Hijrat* (emigration from the infidels' domination) and *Jihad*.

Fourth, the absence of a hierarchical structure within the resistance forced the decentralization of the military action of the Mujahedin forces inside Afghanistan, with little or no coordination at the strategic level and often with no operational cohesiveness. The Mujahedin fronts and commands inside the country found affiliation with one of several parties based in Pakistan and Iran. The relationship was mostly based on the political direction of the *Jihad* by the party/faction leaders and their logistic support of the resistance fronts. The exiled leaderships, however, had minimal input in planning and executing actual military operations inside Afghanistan, which were locally planned and independently carried out.

Regionally, the reaction of Afghanistan's neighbors, Pakistan and Iran, strongly influenced the political context of the war. Fearing the expansion of the Soviet incursion across the Afghan borders into neighboring states, Pakistan and Iran began providing training and material support to the Mujahedin. Pakistan also became the conduit for supplies to the Mujahedin provided by the West, China, and major donors from the Muslim countries. The Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI) began to funnel aid through various Afghan political factions headquartered in Pakistan. The politics of these factions were determined by their leaders' religious convictions—three of which were traditional Islamic parties and four of which were Islamic fundamentalist parties. Pakistan required that the various ethnic and tribal Mujahedin groups join one of the factions in order to receive aid. Over time, this provided the leaders of these factions with political power, which they used to dominate the politics of post-Communist Afghanistan. Pakistani authorities not only skimmed the weapon consignments and diverted some more sophisticated items to the Pakistani army but also favored the most fundamentalist groups and rewarded them accordingly.

To the satisfaction of Pakistan, which saw the division among the Afghan parties in its own interest for better control, the Afghan Mujahedin faction leaders never made serious efforts to join in a sustainable political alliance or form a joint military command in spite of repeated calls by their Muslim donor community. Each attempt to forge a coalition ended in more divisions. After the breakup of the coalition, the alliance's nominal leader formed an additional faction carrying the name of the dissolved alliance.[10] After many alignments and realignments over the years, and following a serious threat by the new Soviet leader Gorbachev to the Pakistani military dictator Zia-ul-Haq, Islamabad brokered the formation of the loose Seven Party Alliance in 1985 with rotating leadership. Pakistan then dealt with them through a well-organized structure.[11]

Iran's ideological solidarity with the Islamic-led Afghan resistance against the Soviet invaders was constrained by the requirements of Tehran's grand revolutionary strategy. The ideological appeal of the Afghan *Jihad* was eclipsed by Iran's political priorities. Iranian revolutionaries paid more attention to the Palestinians than the Afghan Mujahedin and favored Lebanese Shi'as over their Afghan coreligionists.[12] The ambivalence of Iran's policy has been attributed to its continuing course correction along the revolutionary path. Consequently, Iran was reacting to emerging situations rather than pursuing a proactive policy in Afghanistan. Thus, its policy was narrow in scope and sectarian in nature. It mostly targeted the country's Shi'a minority living in the central Afghan mountainous area of Hazarajat. Iran's ideological campaign in the Hazara land added fuel to the internal strife in the area, which was undergoing a profound social upheaval sparked by a power struggle between the traditional establishment and the reformist forces.[13]

In 1980–1981, the National Liberation Movement's Department of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps, which

supervised relations with the Afghan parties, helped set up the pro-Khomeini Nasr party (*Sazman-e Nasr*) under the leadership of Abdul Ali Mazari and Karim Khalili, which recruited its members from the young Hazaras trained in Iran. Iran supported the *Nasr* in its bid to seize the leadership of the Hazarajat *Shura*, which was pursuing a more independent policy. This was followed two years later (1983) by the creation of another pro-Iranian Islamist group, *Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Jahad-e Islami Afghanistan* (Guardians of the Afghan Islamic Jihad), headed by Mohammad Akbari under the direct control of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps.[14] The intra-Shi'a rivalry led to bloody clashes in 1983 and 1984 that spread unchecked across the region, forcing the *Shura* out of its base in Waras (in Bamian), and to the domination of two-thirds of Hazarajat by the pro-Iranian *Nasr* and *Sepah* factions.[15] *Nasr* and *Sepah*'s repressive policies and their brutal treatment of local landowners and supporters of the *Shura* drove thousands of Hazaras to refugee camps in Pakistan or other Afghan provinces.

The Iranian policy of favoring select Afghan factions weakened Tehran's influence over Afghan politics. A number of Shi'a groups forged coalitions with Pakistan-based Sunni Mujahedin factions. Some other Afghan groups turned down Iranian offers for assistance because of the conditions attached to it, including support for Iran's anti-Western policy.[16]

On the international level, the political context was influenced by global actors with varying stakes in the Afghan situation. The United States and the Soviet Union were the two most influential actors on Afghanistan's bloody political scene. The Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan became Moscow's longest foreign war of the century. On the other hand, assistance to the Islamic-led Afghan Mujahedin turned into the United States' largest covert operation since World War II. However, the two

superpowers' engagement in the Afghan conflict was inspired by asymmetric strategic visions. The Soviet Union had militarily occupied its neighbor Afghanistan in support of its distinct regional and ideological interests, while the United States, located half-way around the globe, was waging a surrogate war—defensive in nature—with an ever-changing scope for its military and political objectives. The continued intensification of the war forced Moscow into compromises and finally retreat while Washington gradually widened the scope of its strategic mission from bleeding the Soviets to forcing them out of Afghanistan and finally pushing for a military victory for the Mujahedin over the Moscow-backed Communist regime in Afghanistan.[17]

The CIA secret arms pipeline delivered weapons and ammunition, purchased from different sources, through the ISI to Mujahedin parties based in Pakistan. The supplies reached the Pakistani port of Karachi, from where they were moved over land to Rawalpindi and Quetta to ISI depots for further distribution. Some supplies were transported by air from Dhahran in Saudi Arabia while the Chinese contribution was air transported to Rawalpindi. The CIA supplies during 1983 amounted to about 10,000 tons, which increased to 65,000 tons in 1987.[18] They included a large consignment of assorted rifles, including AK-47 automatic rifles, RPG-7 grenade launchers, 7.62 mm, 12.7 mm, and 14.5 mm light and heavy machine guns, short- and medium-range 107 mm and 122 mm surface-to-surface rockets, 60 mm and 82 mm mortars, 107 mm recoilless antitank rifles, and Milan antitank missiles. In 1984–1985, nearly 50 Swiss-made 20 mm Oerlikon antiaircraft guns were supplied, which were deployed near border bases because of the gun's heavy weight (1,200 pounds each). This was followed in 1985 by thousands of British Blowpipe surface-to-air (SAM) missiles purchased by the CIA and delivered to the Mujahedin. The Blowpipes proved to be less effective against Soviet aircraft,

and consequently they were augmented by the supply of American Stinger air defense missiles. About 1,000 Stingers were delivered in 1986 and 1987.[19] From the first firing of the Stringers on September 25, 1986, near Jalalabad, which brought down three helicopters,[20] until August 1987, some 187 Stingers were used in Afghanistan with 75 percent of aircraft hit.[21] The military aid to the Mujahedin increased incrementally throughout the war. By the late 1980s combined US and Saudi assistance to the resistance reached about $1 billion per year, with approximately $5 billion in weapons sent between 1986 and 1990.[22]

There was also a steady flow of money from the United States, matched equally by Saudi Arabia. The CIA shifted part of the funds to purchase arms from China, Egypt, Israel, the United States, and Britain, and other sums were channeled through ISI Islamabad for providing “software” to the Afghan parties in Peshawar. Monetary contributions from other Arab states were delivered directly to the Mujahedin factions.[23]

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union’s contribution to the DRA was also enormous. Between 1980 and 1989 the Soviet aid amounted to 9.1 billion rubles (the equivalent of about $12 billion), of which 4 billion rubles were delivered in 1989. The aid included 14 R-300 (Scud) missile systems, 10 Luna M (Frog) missile launchers, 767 battle tanks, 471 infantry fighting vehicles, 1,388 armored personnel carriers, 116 rocket systems, 1,212 artillery pieces and mortars, 3,804 grenade launchers, 5,680 flame-throwers, 16 shoulder-fired antiaircraft missile Strela-10s, 109,000 small arms, 700 air defense systems and guns, 76 aircraft, 36 helicopters, 4,897 artillery and mortar rounds, and 112,000 aerial bombs. In 1990, Afghanistan was given 1.8 billion rubles, including half a billion worth of tanks, aircraft, and artillery pieces. The annual cost of the 40th Army presence in Afghanistan was

about 7.5 billion rubles (about 20.5 million rubles in daily expenditure).[24]

It was widely believed, particularly in the West (including the United States), that the Soviet Union had entered Afghanistan to stay and would not withdraw until it turned the country into a satellite state. Some analysts speculated that by using Afghanistan as a springboard, the Kremlin might decide to advance further south toward the Gulf when it saw an opportunity. These perceptions strongly influenced the policy of regional and global powers and the future of the region and of Afghanistan in particular. The growing resistance in Afghanistan against the Soviet occupation was seen as an opportunity to bleed the Communist superpower through supporting and arming the Afghan Mujahedin, who were locked in a fervent ideological struggle with the atheist invaders. US intelligence believed that the Islamists were the most zealous and devoted anti-Soviet fighters and would continue the war for generations, entrapping the Russian bear in a quagmire.

Meanwhile, Pakistan under General Zia-ul-Haq used the opportunity to rise as a frontline state and attract international assistance, including arms and funds, that would not only contain the Soviet expansion but also help Pakistan polish its Islamic identity at home and emerge as a leader in the Muslim world. A close confident of Zia, quoted by Hussein Haqani, stated that “Zia-ul-Haq believed that Islamic precepts should be influential in Pakistan social life to such an extent that those seeking to move Pakistan in the direction of secularism and socialism should fail in their design.” He also aspired to make Pakistan a strong Muslim power “capable of providing strength to Islamic revivalist movements in adjoining countries and regions.”[25] The Pakistani military dictator’s orientation proved instrumental in favoring the Afghan Mujahedin parties with a similar

fundamentalist Islamic orientation over those that embraced nationalist-Islamic views.

The Pakistani bias toward the Islamist Mujahedin factions also influenced the CIA covert operation in support of the Afghan resistance. Being the conduit of foreign military assistance to the Mujahedin, Pakistan channeled most aid to the four fundamentalist Afghan Mujahedin groups. A former ISI officer in charge of the ISI Afghan project, Brigadier Mohammad Yusaf, wrote that the fundamentalist parties received about 75 percent of the aid.[26] This aid distribution gave the Afghan religious leaders unprecedented power in the conduct of the war. It also undermined the traditional authority of the tribal and village leaders.

Thus, dominated by religious orthodoxy, the fundamentalists received the bulk of US and other foreign assistance channeled through Pakistani intelligence. The process marginalized the mainstream Afghan forces that embraced moderate religious and nationalistic orientation but lacked a strong leadership. The fragmentation of the resistance coupled with the continued support of competing Islamist factions inevitably became a recipe for civil war and unintended religious radicalization once the Soviets left a few years later.

Parallel to the US-led efforts to support the Afghan Mujahedin in their struggle, a more shadowy campaign was spearheaded by Islamists from the Muslim countries and funded by Arab governments and nongovernment organizations. This campaign was waged with the aim of providing humanitarian assistance to the Afghan refugees in Pakistan and providing military and logistic support to the Islamist factions of Afghan Mujahedin, particularly to the factions of Abdul Rab Rasoul Sayaf, Gulboddin Hekmatyar, and Burhanuddin Rabbani. There were several types of Arab “volunteers” rushing to *Jihad* in Afghanistan: There were those who were inspired to join a just cause of defending

their fellow Muslims of Afghanistan against the Soviet invasion. There were also ideologically motivated elements fighting for a Muslim land against the threat of Communism. Some groups came to polish their *Jihadist* and revolutionary credentials for their own wars back home by joining the Afghan *Jihad* and receiving battlefield training. Some others were intelligence operatives deployed by different countries.[27] Most of their activities began in the context of charity organizations, service providers, and fund-raising fronts.

One of the vanguards of the effort was Abdullah ‘Azzam (1941–1989), a Palestinian Sunni Islamic scholar and revolutionary who promoted the cause of the Afghan *Jihad*. ‘Azzam founded the Maktab al-Khidmat (MAK), also known as Afghan Service Bureau, in 1984 in Peshawar to raise funds and recruit foreign fighters for anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan. The MAK invested in religious education in the refugee camps in Pakistan and inside Afghanistan and was also running madrassas for ideological education in support of the *Jihad*.[28] The MAK recruited volunteers and organized an international network for mobilizing Muslim volunteers to join the *Jihad*. ‘Azzam was a teacher and mentor of Osama bin Laden and persuaded him to move to Pakistan and help the *Jihad*. ‘Azzam and his growing number of followers in the *Jihad* camp promoted the political rise of Islam. Known as the father of the global *Jihad*, ‘Azzam, together with bin Laden, founded the al-Qaeda *Jihadist* organization. As the war in Afghanistan dragged on, the activities of Arab volunteers expanded into actual participation in the fighting inside Afghanistan. By the mid-1980s, a number of camps (regiments) of Arab fighters were set up inside Afghanistan, mostly in the eastern border provinces. The foreign fighters, however, rarely ventured to fight as a separate unit but often joined certain Afghan Mujahedin commanders

affiliated with Islamist parties to conduct military operations.[29]

Zia-ul-Haq's government saw the rush of Islamists to the Afghan battlefields and their logistic activities as a boost to the Islamization of the region, an outcome that Zia had promoted. Pakistan facilitated the influx of Arab volunteers to the Afghan border area. However, Pakistan had no firm control over the activities of the shadowy *Jihadist* organizations that gradually radicalized the society, particularly in the North West Frontier Province (now Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa). The US inclination to pit the Islamists against the Soviets in Afghanistan did not help either. The United States even helped create an international network of militant Islamists to fight with the Mujahedin in Afghanistan.[30] This policy ignored the long-term impact of the militants' political influence in the postwar period. The US perspective was swayed by the polarized nature of global politics when international issues were often seen through the prism of the East-West ideological confrontation. Their narrow focus and short-term interests proved counterproductive in the long term. The hostile empire of the Soviet Union disappeared in a decade, but the radicalization of the region became the source of the real threat to the world at large.

The Asymmetric Conflict and Ways of War

The initial composition of the Soviet Army in Afghanistan (Limited Contingent of the Soviet Forces in Afghanistan, LCSFA) included two motorized rifle division (the 108th and the 5th), an airborne division (the 103rd), an air assault brigade, two separate motorized rifle regiments, and other support units, for a total of 52,000 soldiers. The strength of the 40th Army gradually expanded as the Soviet forces increasingly engaged in combat and as the need for light

forces for counterinsurgency operations increased. In 1980 another motorized rifle division (the 201st) and two separate motorized rifle brigades (the 66th and the 70th) were added to the LCSFA. At this time, the total number of the army rose to 81,000, with 62,000 frontline troops. This included 600 tanks, 1,500 infantry fighting vehicles, 300 armored personal carriers, 900 artillery pieces, and 500 fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters.[31] With the addition of one parachute regiment and two Spetsnaz brigades, the maximum strength of the Soviet forces in Afghanistan reached 109,000 men and women. The air force formations under the command of the 40th Army included two combat aviation regiments, one combat aviation squadron, one mixed aviation regiment, and three regiments and three separate squadrons of helicopters, for a total of 60 combat and 19 transport aircraft and 253 helicopters. The air assets were based in Kabul, Bagram, Shindand, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Kunduz, Lashkargah, Maimana, Faizabad, Ghazni, and Gardez. Additionally, during major operations, Soviet forces across the border, including long-range bombers and other aircraft, participated in military actions in Afghanistan and withdrew at the end of the operation. The Afghans used the term “external Soviets” for the troops temporarily deployed into their country.

The bulk of the Soviet forces were deployed south of the Hindu Kush and in the west of the country, generally in two eastern and western sectors along the border with Pakistan and Iran. Just before the withdrawal in 1988, out of over 100,000 troops, 57,500 were based in the eastern sector (east of Zabul Province and including the northeast provinces) and 42,800 were stationed in the western sector (west of Ghazni and Gardez to Herat).[32]

The majority of combat troops were assigned to security missions, protecting garrisons, Soviet and Afghan government installations, and the main communication

routes. In 1980 and 1981, out of 73 combat battalions, only eight battalions (9 percent of the total battalions) were available for combat missions. Later, the number of available battalions for combat increased and by 1988 reached 30 battalions, or about 30 percent of the total combat force. In some divisions more battalions were engaged in security missions than others.[33]

The Soviet offensive combat theory was designed for a full-scale conventional and possibly nuclear war on the plains of Europe and did not match the military situation of a full-blown insurgency in a mountainous country. The widespread, decentralized, and locally based resistance structure of the Afghan Mujahedin naturally raised its survival capability through dispersion and reduced its detectability and target size and thereby contributed to the elusiveness and ambiguity, which operationally led to deception and surprise. This was a situation where the Soviet theory of the deep offensive based on enormous firepower to destroy the major groupings of the enemy forces and seize important terrain features was not applicable because the dispersion of self-sufficient versatile light guerrilla forces made targeting difficult except through area-saturation fire. The nationwide nature of the resistance made these saturation fires impractical unless they aimed to destroy the population centers as a whole. Rather than selectively destroy the guerrillas, war on the population became the Soviets' strategy of choice to indirectly exhaust the base of support of the resistance.

The Soviet military strategy in Afghanistan was manifested by three distinct features as the Soviet army prosecuted the war over more than nine years: securing the key cities and communication network in Afghanistan to consolidate the occupation; mounting major conventional military operations combined with taking the war to the rural population to destroy the support base of the

resistance; and the introduction of light forces such as Special Purpose Troops (Spetsnaz) to intercept Mujahedin infiltration convoys and complement the operation of heavy forces.

During the first two months of occupation, the Soviet forces focused their efforts on consolidating control over key urban centers and military bases and securing the position of the new Moscow-installed regime in Kabul. No offensive operations were conducted during this phase. The armed opposition against the Soviet occupation, however, kept intensifying day by day. In early February 1980, General Pavlovski, commander in chief of the Soviet ground forces, visited Afghanistan to assess the situation in the country. A month later, in March, the initial optimism faded and "the party was over." The 40th Army was ordered to prepare and conduct an operation in the eastern border province of Kunar with the mission of advancing to the provincial capital of Asadabad in order to open the road and break the blockade of the city and fight the armed opposition. This opened a violent phase of Soviet offensive operations across the country, with vast destruction, enormous loss of life, and a massive displacement of the population. According to General Gromov, who participated in the operation in Kunar, the Soviet troops were not prepared or trained to fight in the difficult mountain terrain of Afghanistan. The Soviet tactical manuals on mountain warfare were hardly relevant to the operation environment. They were meant to be applied to the European and Chinese type of hilly terrain, which was a far cry from the alpine nature of the Afghan topography. Their standard advanced security elements such as the movement support detachment (OOD)[34] and advance guard were unable to deploy in closed terrain to provide security for the main column as they struggled to advance. The leading battalions came to a standstill in the narrow defiles under heavy Mujahedin fire from side ridges.[35]

In the following years, the Soviets learned many hard lessons and endured numerous tactical setbacks in the mountains of Afghanistan before they reoriented the conventional methodology of their operational patterns to a military situation where an overreliance on motorized rifle and tank forces to conduct deep operations in the shortest possible time was not enough to resolve operational missions. In the initial phase of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the lack of experience in counterguerrilla warfare, along with the lack of creativity, on the one hand, and a strategic tendency to seek early decisive results, on the other, led the Soviet forces to stick to conventional assaults by motorized rifle units employing traditional formations in set-piece battle. This led to heavy Soviet casualties. Moreover, the high defections from Kabul regime's army and the increasing problems of recruitment for the armed forces created a low force-to-space ratio, making it very difficult, if not impossible, for the Soviets to hold the areas overrun by their military offensives. The Soviets would seize a position at a heavy cost only to lose possession once the combat forces had left. According to Soviet sources, by October 1981, within nearly two years of occupation the Soviet-backed Afghan government controlled only 5,000 villages out of the total number of 35,000, or less than 15 percent of the villages across the country, indicating no significant changes in the situation from the summer of the previous year.[36] The Afghan resistance by active offensive action kept ambushing Soviet convoys and raiding isolated government outposts and military garrisons.

The Soviet army was never able to deploy sufficient forces to compensate for the weak and shrinking Afghan army. They were unable to commit more than 109,000 troops in Afghanistan, three times the size of Vietnam, where the US forces at their peak numbered over a half-million.[37] While Moscow was involved in fighting in Afghanistan, it

maintained 565,000 troops in Eastern Europe, 75,000 in Mongolia, and 25,000 to 30,000 in other third world countries.[38] And the logistics limitations hardly allowed the deployment of larger forces in the harsh topographic environment of Afghanistan, with its underdeveloped road networks. The occupation of Afghanistan and a quick military solution were obtainable only through a massive deployment of 30 to 35 divisions and a heavy intensification of the military effort entailing massive and perhaps unacceptable personnel loss and prohibitive economic and political costs. The actual level of Soviet troops in Afghanistan was enough only for a partial occupation and part-time control of selected territories. Most of the Soviet forces' success in driving the Mujahedin from their strongholds was temporary, as the Mujahedin would return as soon as the Soviet columns left the area. There was "clearing" without "holding." In 1986, Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, the chief of general staff of the Soviet army, told the Politburo that "there is no single piece of land in the country [Afghanistan] which has not been occupied by a Soviet soldier. Nevertheless, the majority of the territory remains in the hands of rebels."[39] Consequently, at the end of 1986, out of 31,000 to 35,000 villages, only 8,000 were under government control and only 2,700 villages participated in elections in the same year.[40]

The alternative was a long, drawn-out, and eventually unsuccessful war, implying coordinated efforts on military, intelligence, economic, and political fronts to defeat the resistance by destroying the very basis of its resistance potential and vitality. It represented a long-term political-strategic investment with minimal personal and economic costs. By 1982, it was obvious that the Soviets were pushing toward this latter solution rather than winning it through decisive and quick military actions or a well-designed

counterinsurgency to drive a wedge between the insurgents and the population.

Exasperated by the omnipresent resistance fighters who moved freely and were widely supported in rural Afghanistan and covertly in urban areas, the Soviet command decided to target the very base of the resistance and take the war to the rural population. This was the source of the viability of the resistance: the countryside—the “village states.” The Soviets had learned that the urban areas were manageable and controllable. They even saw the cities as not very difficult to Sovietize, while all the threat was coming at them from the countryside. Therefore, they cut the cities and major towns off from the villages by destroying most of the villages around the major towns and their military bases. Further, they extensively and indiscriminately destroyed the countryside, crops, irrigation systems, and rural economy to force the population to leave the country or take refuge in the major cities, where a wide program of Sovietization of the society was being implemented. By depopulating the rural area, they expected to deprive the resistance of local support and safe bases of operation. As many observers have noted since 1982, the Soviets, inspired by Mao Zedong saying that guerrillas live in a population like a fish in water, decided to deny life to the “fish” by draining the water. By 1988, the Afghan refugees in Pakistan numbered 3.3 million and in Iran about two million. Further, about two million others were displaced inside Afghanistan, mostly crowded into the major cities.

Contrary to other guerrilla wars, the Soviet-backed government in Kabul and its Soviet supporters sought victory through the destruction of the local economy, while the Mujahedin considered the continuity and operation of the local economic structure as vital to their military operations. Ironically, the Soviets in Afghanistan were seeking to destroy the resistance using the same method

that guerrillas have traditionally used around the world to defeat invading armies: to wear down the enemy in a war of attrition and gradually raise the costs of war for the enemy. The Soviets had previously used this same pattern successfully in the Basmachi war in the 1930s in Central Asia.

The destruction of rural population areas deprived the Mujahedin of local logistic bases. In order to support their operations, the Mujahedin were forced to transport the bulk of their food supplies as well as ammunition from Pakistan and Iran into Afghanistan. The Mujahedin created a series of supply depots and base camps in good defensible areas across the country to stockpile locally supplies for further distribution, and they fiercely defended them against the Soviet major offensive operations. This situation raised the costs of moving supplies from strategic sources across the border to combat areas and thus limited the duration of combat action at any given point. By 1986, the cost of the transportation of supplies from Pakistan to northern Afghanistan was raised to $15 to $20 per kilogram of cargo, which meant that getting a mortar to Mazar-i-Sharif cost $1,100. This cost the Mujahedin parties 1.5 million dollars a month in transportation fees.[41] The supplies were being trucked in or carried by tens of thousands of mules provided initially by the United States and later by China. They traveled along 300 infiltration routes across the Afghan-Pakistani border. In 1987, the CIA station manager in Islamabad was coordinating the movement of 60,000 tons of weapons and other supplies annually to the Mujahedin using five- and ten-ton trucks, smaller pickups, and pack mules. Milt Beardon, the station chief, “discovered that on an annual basis we needed more mules than the world seemed prepared to breed.”[42]

The sociopolitical consequences of the situation were even deeper. The base camps in the mountains and valleys

turned into centers of political power (*Markaz*) for the Mujahedin field commanders and were a precursor to the emergence of warlords and patronage networks in the post-Soviet period. At the same time, the Mujahedin constantly attacked the Soviet supply convoys to choke their support system. The Soviets continuously targeted the Mujahedin base camps or *Markaz* to thwart their support system. One of the major achievements of the Mujahedin came in August 1986, when rockets with time fuses fired from Paghman by Commander Abdul Haq's group destroyed a major dump at Qargha in the Kabul suburbs. They destroyed about 40,000 tons of ammunition valued at about 250 million dollars.[43]

Thus the war turned into a contest by both sides to control the other's logistics. The Soviets used aerial bombing, scatterable mines, crop burnings, and assaults on Mujahedin base camps to deprive the insurgents of their sources of food, shelter, and rest. Meanwhile, the Mujahedin hit the Soviet lines of communication (LOC), which were a network of roads winding through the mountain passes—some of the most inhospitable terrain on earth. The Mujahedin constantly cut the road and ambushed convoys carrying material from the Soviet Union. The Soviet presence depended on its ability to keep the roads open. Much of the Soviet combat in Afghanistan was a fight for control of the road network. The Soviet security of the Eastern LOC required 26 battalions manning 199 outposts, patrolling the LOCs, or escorting convoys. The more open Western LOC required three battalions. More than three-fourths of Soviet combat forces were routinely involved in security missions. For example, the 108 Motorized Rifle Division had 80 percent of its troops assigned to security duties.[44] The resistance destroyed over 11,000 Soviet trucks. DRA truck losses were reportedly higher. The Mujahedin ability to interdict the LOC was a constant concern to the Soviets and

prevented them from maintaining a larger occupation force in Afghanistan.

By mid-1985, the Soviets increased the use of light infantry forces in counterinsurgency operations. They began widening the role of Special Forces in conducting deep patrolling, in raids, in intercepting Mujahedin infiltrations across the border, and in targeting their supply convoys moving on mountain paths. In the spring of 1985, the number of Soviet separate special purpose (Spetsnaz) battalions was increased, and these were deployed on the Pakistan border. The eight battalions were grouped in two brigades, one headquartered in Jalalabad to intercept Mujahedin convoys in the east and the other based in Lashkargah, the center of Helmand Province. More than 60 percent of the border with Pakistan and Iran (about 2,000 kilometers) was covered by these battalions, which were considered one of the most effective units of the 40th Army. Each battalion had 500 men, all well-trained professionals. Each brigade had a helicopter squadron to insert the groups in their action area.[45] The groups laid ambush at long distances from their landing site at night or the day before the action and then walked to their designated place. The motorized element supporting the raid moved later from points 50 to 60 kilometers from the battle site to maintain secrecy. According to General Gromov, on only three occasions was a Spetsnaz group totally wiped out by the Mujahedin who had laid ambushes in potential Spetsnaz landing areas and then attacked the group.[46]

The political aspect of the strategy included the intensified efforts to win over some tribes to their side and consequently extend the tribal militia force, to exploit the disunity among the people and encourage ethnic separatism, and to invest in a new Afghan generation by creating a pro-Soviet Afghan elite through extensive education of Afghan children in the Soviet Union. The

Soviets also conducted a massive propaganda campaign to win the hearts and minds of the people. With the scorched-earth destruction of the countryside, however, there was little left of the hearts and minds to win. Subversive-action efforts by an infiltrated agent network inside the resistance complemented this strategy. This was aided by a wide disinformation campaign around the world to cover up the Soviets' brutality and the mass killing of the Afghan population.

The Foundation of the Afghan Resistance

The Afghan resistance is often described as a number of Mujahedin parties based in Pakistan and Iran directing the anti-Soviet war inside Afghanistan. However, the structure of the Afghan resistance was more multidimensional and kaleidoscopic. The Mujahedin political parties headquartered in Pakistan and Iran were important, as they represented the resistance in the international fora, received funds, arms, and other supplies to support the war fronts inside Afghanistan, and provided political direction and logistics to Mujahedin fighting units. The actual fighting, however, was planned and independently carried out by the local Mujahedin commanders inside the country, though they claimed affiliation with one or the other exile parties. Even when the exiled parties did plan combat operations, they often involved a single faction, not the whole group.

The Pakistan-based parties included four fundamentalist and three traditionalist Islamic factions. The former group included the Hezb-e Islami (Islamic Party, HIG), headed by Gulboddin Hekmatyar; the Jamiat-e Islami (Islamic Society, IS), led by Burhanuddin Rabbani; the Hezb-e Islami Khales (Islamic Party of Khales, HIK), headed by Mawlawi Yunus Khales; and the Etihad-e Islami (Islamic Union, IU), led by Abdur Rab Rasoul Sayaf. The latter group consisted of

Harakat-e Enqelb-i-Islami Afghanistan (Islamic Revolutionary Movement of Afghanistan, IRMA), led by Mawlawi Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi; the Mahaz-e Mili Islami Afghanistan (National Islamic Front of Afghanistan, NIFA), headed by Pir Sayed Ahmad Gailani; and the Jabha-e Mili Nejat-e Afghanistan (National Liberation Front of Afghanistan, NLFA), led by Hazrat Sebghatullah Mujaddedi.

Pursuing differing political lines, the exiled Mujahedin leaders never agreed to institutionalize their joint effort in spite of their intermittent loose alliances under the pressure of the donor community. They never pooled their political, military, and financial sources together but continued to compete individually for international recognition and the acquisition of a larger chunk of outside assistance. In most cases they used inflated numbers of adherents, which often added up to far more than the population of Afghanistan as a measure of success and effectiveness to impress the donors and support their fund-raising drives. The play with numbers and concerns about the size of membership gradually became a source of corruption as the parties were reluctant to bring their delinquent members to account, fearing it could drive them to join a rival party. Further, such competition involved fake reporting to get credit for military achievements that did not happen or were highly exaggerated, making video footage of staged combat enactments, and attacking rival Mujahedin factions inside Afghanistan in turf battles. The interparty competition inhibited the cohesive conduct of the war, hampered unified military action, and hindered coordinated operations against the enemy because the parties were fighting for the leadership of the *Jihad*.

The operational structure of the Afghan resistance basically conformed to the social setup of the society. A village, being a basic political and almost self-reliant economic entity, became the basis of a guerrilla unit as well.

Even most of those resistance members who were formerly military officers, soldiers, students, civil servants, and teachers had to return to their home villages in order to fit in the rural structure of the resistance. Depending on the size of the village and the extent of the social interaction and distance between a number of villages, regions, and tribal divisions, the size of Mujahedin units was very different, ranging from a separate company-sized unit to a larger formation. Larger organizations were set up in only a few areas. Some Mujahedin factions created nominal battalions, regiments, and even divisions,[47] but in essence they were loose collections of locally based resistance fighters clustered around influential leaders.

The decentralized structure of resistance produced only decentralized military actions. Apart from a few exceptions, the hundreds of separate Mujahedin *Jabhas* (groups) had virtually no operational coordination between them. While this was considered a disadvantage resulting in an inability to mobilize large forces and coordinated action against selected targets and to organize nationwide political and military campaigns, it had the inherent advantages of dispersal and of being a system of endless resistance lines, creating a strategic continuity of resistance, as opposed to quick, decisive action. The village-based logistics helped the continuity and sustainability of the resistance as a whole but not of prolonged large-scale decisive combat actions.

According to some Soviet veterans of the war, until 1984 the Soviet commands did not clearly know the enemy who was facing them. The Soviet forces were continually attacked, but they hardly understood the lack of connection between the individual attacks to some larger plan. Being used to structured systems and organized actions, the Soviets were faced with a nonconventional and confused structure. Only later in the war did they realize that the enemy forces were responsible only to the individual

Mujahedin field commanders and were not a structured guerrilla movement such as Mao Zedong's or the Vietcong of South Vietnam. They were aware of the Pakistan-based Mujahedin factions, but they saw them as the political and logistic sources of the resistance, not the actual fighting forces, which were local.[48]

Mujahedin Tactical Operations

The Mujahedin were tough fighters, and there was no lack of courage under fire, even in the most difficult combat. However, the lack of a tactical organizational structure and the absence of adequate longer-range support weapons hindered the exploitation of close-quarter fighting in order to become a more substantive tactical and operational achievement. A light force such as the Afghan resistance fighters, facing a well-equipped and heavily armed enemy, naturally sought survival in the face of overwhelming enemy attack through dispersion, elusiveness, and ambiguity. The concentration of individual Mujahedin units was effected when a large area was cordoned off by the Soviet forces, entrapping several resistance groups, and the encircled Mujahedin then worked together to fight off the enemy. Another case of a major concentration of Mujahedin forces also occurred when they all were targeted by a Soviet offensive operation and the resistance forces in the affected area cooperated in fighting the enemy.

While the assault rifle was the signature arm of the Mujahedin, their most important weapon in the conflict was the RPG-7 antitank grenade launcher. This Soviet-manufactured, short-range weapon allowed the Mujahedin to knock out tanks, trucks, and, occasionally, helicopters. The RPG was a great weapon in an ambush. Although the Mujahedin were light infantry, heavier crew–served weapons gave them more range and staying power in a fight.

Mortars, rockets, recoilless rifles, and heavy machine guns were essential to the force that intended to hold its ground for a time against mechanized Soviet and DRA forces.

The most common forms of Mujahedin decentralized tactics carried out locally were the ambush, raid, shelling attack, mining, convoy interception, and defending base camps.[49]

The ambush was a favorite tactic of the Mujahedin since it allowed them to mass forces covertly, attack the enemy, seize needed supplies, and retreat before the enemy could effectively react. The ambush has long been part of the Afghan warrior tradition and has been a key feature of historic Afghan warfare. The ambush served to attack the Soviet and DRA lines of communication, provided needed supplies, and forced the bulk of Soviet and DRA maneuver forces to perform security missions. Logistics were the key to the conduct of the Soviet and Afghan war, and Mujahedin ambushes threatened the resupply of Soviet and DRA forces and limited the number of Soviet troops that could be deployed into the country. The Mujahedin conducted ambushes for harassment or for spoils mostly against small columns of combat forces or supply convoys using detachments of 30 to 80 men divided into observers, an assault group, and a support group. The Mujahedin launched several thousand ambushes every year. According to Soviet accounts the Mujahedin carried out 10,000 ambushes between 1985 and 1987, with an annual average of 3,300. The ambushes were laid on the main roads, paths, passes, and narrow valleys.[50]

The raid was basically an attack on isolated enemy outposts and local administrative centers to seize a point, exploit success, and then withdraw. It was a temporary measure to capture equipment, destroy installations, bait traps to draw enemy reactions, and attack morale. The raid formation included an assault group and a support group,

including heavy weapons. Between 1985 and 1987, the Mujahedin mounted about 9,500 raids on Soviet and DRA targets, which averaged annually about 3,200 actions.[51] The relatively short range and limited number of close support weapons (mostly mortars) shortened the depth of a raid and the exploitation of an assault. The extensive use of protective mines by the Soviets around their outposts and other targets, along with the limited capability of resistance forces to locate and remove them or to destroy them with massive fire prior to the attack, caused serious problems during raids on enemy posts.

Mujahedin shelling attacks on garrisons, outposts, airfields, and cities were a daily event. The Mujahedin usually used mortars, rockets, and recoilless rifles in these attacks. Sometimes they used mountain guns and howitzers. The objective was to harass their enemy and destroy war material. Shelling was conducted against stronger Soviet or DRA targets, where raids were risky and required large forces. Shelling and rocket attacks using the 107 mm and 122 mm single and multiple Chinese-made rockets or the Egyptian Saqar-20 and Saqar-30 surface-to-surface missiles, with ranges between seven and 30 kilometers, were persistently conducted. Russian accounts recorded 23,500 shelling attacks on military and government targets during the period between April 1985 and January 1986.[52]

Mine warfare was a favorite technique with the Mujahedin. It was a relatively inexpensive way to attack personnel and vehicles. Most Mujahedin mines were antitank and antivehicular. When the Mujahedin employed antipersonnel mines, they preferred the directional mine similar to the US claymore mine. Soviet mines were mostly antipersonnel. During the war, the Mujahedin were supplied with many types of foreign antitank mines. The Mujahedin preference for homemade mines in metal cans made it easier for Soviet

mine detectors to find them. They usually combined demolitions and mining with other forms of offensive and defensive action. They often covered their mines with direct fire weapons and seldom left their mines unattended. After an ambush or fight, they would often dig up their unexpended mines and take them with them to the next mission. The Mujahedin often stacked three antitank mines on top of each other to guarantee a catastrophic kill. Many Afghans were creative mine-makers, and they preferred to make their own antitank mines from unexploded ordnance and other antitank mines.

The Mujahedin laid siege to isolated DRA garrisons. If the besieging Mujahedin were local, then the siege went on indefinitely. If outside Mujahedin were involved, the siege usually failed since the Mujahedin could not maintain the supplies necessary for the siege or keep enough of the Mujahedin in place. Since the Mujahedin were unpaid volunteers who also had family responsibilities, they were seldom interested in staying around for lengthy sieges. The Mujahedin siege was a conventional battle by a guerrilla force. Many ended in a tactical setback. Had the Mujahedin established an operational command system during the conduct of a siege, it would have been easier for them to coordinate their actions in terms of time and space: the lack of such an arrangement often left a sizeable Mujahedin force without operational support by other local groups, especially in blocking the movement of Soviet and DRA reinforcements

The Afghan Mujahedin usually fought through surprise attacks and sought the destruction of the enemy in close combat. But the limited number and short range of antitank weapons drastically reduced the sustainability of a light force facing a mechanized enemy supported by ample artillery and unchallenged air power. Therefore, the hit-and-run tactics practiced by local resistance units against

superior enemy forces actually became tactics that had a short hit and a long run. The Mujahedin were well aware of the importance of close combat and they fought it very well, but they heavily suffered from the inadequate number and shorter range of their weapons.

In spite of their severe technological limitations, the Mujahedin effectively exploited the qualitative advantages of tactical situations. Due to the restriction of the enemy forces in fixed bases, the resistance maximized their ability to use free maneuver and flexibility in attacking the enemy posts at the time and place of their choice and continuously kept stationary enemy targets under shelling and rocket attacks. As of mid-1985, the capital city of Kabul came under continual rocket attacks with significant psychological impact. The Mujahedin light forces could successfully infiltrate through the security lines around the bases (about 150 posts in three cordons protected Kabul city) to launch raids or shelling attacks on selected targets and safely withdraw through the gaps in enemy lines.

One of the most serious vulnerabilities of the resistance forces was the lack of an effective air defense system. For years, the Mujahedin had to deal with the enemy aircraft with simple weapons such as SAM-7 and heavy anti-aircraft machine guns. They also attacked enemy planes on the ground with the RPG-7 and rockets. The delivery of more sophisticated air defense weapons, including shoulder-fired British-made Blowpipe and American-supplied Stinger air defense missiles in 1985–1986 significantly enhanced the Mujahedin’s protection against enemy aircraft, driving them to higher altitudes, curbing their effectiveness, and destroying them at lower heights.

The Soviet Military Operations

During the presence of the Soviet forces in Afghanistan, they launched 220 independent (all-Soviet) and 400 combined (Soviet and DRA) large-scale military operations.[53] But large-scale operations were seldom as effective as smaller-scale tactical fights. The Soviet military and intelligence forces conducted thousands of independent ambushes, raids, and reconnaissance missions throughout their presence in Afghanistan. For example, in 1983 and 1984 alone the planned and unplanned ambush missions numbered 4,884, with less than 10 percent resulting. Nearly 450 reconnaissance missions were launched during the same period.[54]

The independent operations were planned and executed by the Soviet forces when DRA forces were not available or sufficiently trained for combined action. Independent operations usually involved at least one regiment with supporting air and artillery, and most were conducted during the early stages of the war. The Soviets soon realized that they needed to help create an effective DRA army before they could withdraw. The tactics that were usually controlled directly at the battalion level were the ambush, the hamlet cordon and search, the convoy escort, and other special actions. The ambush was basically a small-unit action carried out by a company or smaller Spetsnaz groups. Escorting convoys was a new type of combat action performed by motorized rifle units. Usually a convoy of 80 to 100 trucks stretched over 2 to 2.5 kilometers was escorted by security details from a company-sized unit and covered by helicopters from above. Raids were conducted by larger forces—one or two reinforced motorized rifle battalions. The Soviets used up to a regiment in conducting cordon and search operations, usually in cooperation with and in support of DRA forces and air-landed troops. By the order of the 40th Army Command, in each large military post (regiment and brigade) a standby unit consisting of a

reinforced battalion or company was assigned and ready to move out for a combat mission at short notice. On average, a standby unit would go out 20 to 25 times a month for combat.[55] Depending on the mission, a battalion was reinforced by a tank company or an artillery battery or battalion and supported by helicopter gunships.[56]

Until the middle of the 1980s, operations were conducted in a conventional way along the main roads and valleys and other axes by heavy columns of motorized rifle formations. The operation of heavy columns in mountainous terrain was less effective and produced no desirable results. The divisions and regiments were assigned large areas of responsibility, which were about 200 square kilometers for a division and 70 to 100 square kilometers for a regiment. Obviously they could not control all the area. In light of the initial experience, modification in the structure and use of forces and means was introduced that improved the methods prescribed in Soviet military field manuals.

The combined operations were mostly multidivisional campaigns by combined Soviet and DRA forces lasting usually two to three weeks and sometimes longer. During these operations, the combined Soviet and DRA forces mounted military actions to seize territory controlled by the resistance in order to destroy existing Mujahedin forces there and then withdraw to their secure bases. The low force-to-space ratio precluded holding the areas overrun by the attacking forces. The key points seized were often handed over to the DRA forces to hold. The aim was not destroying the insurgents to seize territory; it was seizing territory to destroy the resistance. Major offensive operations were mounted to destroy powerful Mujahedin forces in the resistance-controlled areas, to restore government authority in districts, to relieve besieged DRA military garrisons and administrative centers, to support the free movement of supply convoys, and finally to protect the

withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan at the end of the war. In a letter to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, the *Pravda* correspondent I. Shchedrov wrote on November 12, 1981, that

> the big operations aimed at destroying the bands and the rebel strongholds backing the counter-revolution, which are undertaken in the situation where 85% of the hamlets still remain under the control of the rebels, do not have much of an effect. Upon completing such an operation, the Afghan-Soviet troops as a rule return to their bases and the regions fall back under the control of the rebels. The practice of leaving [groups] of Kabul regime in some isolated settlements without a permanent cover by the military forces does not change the situation.[57]

The major operations were launched simultaneously in different areas or consecutively, as the situation required. Due to the unavailability of sufficient Soviet combat troops, large numbers of understrength DRA battalions were combined with the committed Soviet units. For example, in the Operation Udar-1 (the Strike) in November 1980, 64 Soviet and 110 DRA battalions participated in combat actions across the country. In the spring (March to May) of 1981, some 37 Soviet and 109 DRA battalions took part in seven separate operations throughout Afghanistan.[58]

Using their technological edge as a force multiplier, the Soviets were able to maintain control of their isolated garrisons and the centers of subnational government for years in the face of continued siege by the Mujahedin forces. Constant and reliable air supply, and often unchallenged air supply, and often unchallenged air support and bombing enabled the Soviets and the DRA not only to maintain their encircled military garrisons and posts in remote areas but also to prop up even those isolated, nominal, and symbolic administrative bodies at the district level that were cut off by the resistance dominance of the area. Using the advantage of their geographic contiguousness to the war zone, the Soviets regularly flew their home-based troops by helicopter across their border to

conduct operations against Mujahedin in northern Afghanistan and returned them to their bases in Soviet territory.

The Soviets made more substantial achievements in their underground intelligence war than what they accomplished on their combat fronts. The hidden war was waged by the Soviet intelligence agencies, including the KGB and the GRU (Main Intelligence Department of the USSR Ministry of Defense). One of the KGB's main responsibilities was the establishment of a new and effective Afghan security service modeled on the KGB, the Khedivate-e Etela'at-e Dawlati (KHAD), to replace Amin's secret police (KAM). The KHAD was trained, organized, and largely financed by the KGB. In 1980, the KGB provided 250 million convertible rubles to pay the KHAD's salary.[59] In January 1980 an energetic and brutal PDPA senior member, Najibullah, was appointed to head the notorious agency. Code-named Potomok, Najibullah had probably previously been recruited as an agent or confidential contact by the KGB.[60] The KHAD has been proved even more brutal than its predecessor. Frustrated by facing an unwinnable war, the KGB revived "some of its Stalinist past."[61]

The KGB also played a direct role in the war through its special forces, particularly the *Kaskad* units, each of which had 145 men who were moved out to locate, penetrate, and destabilize the Mujahedin in the way it worked against the Basmachi. Their purpose was to persuade the Mujahedin commanders to change sides and then attack the genuine Mujahedin groups. For example, in early 1981, the KGB agents persuaded Khwaja Sher Agha Chungar (code-named Abay) to cooperate with them. Chungar commanded a 250-man group of Mujahedin and controlled 48 villages on the communication route in Herat. Chungar followed instructions from his KGB handlers and participated in 21 major joint actions with the *Kaskad* units and independently

laid 40 ambushes, killing 31 Mujahedin commanders. Chungar's forces expanded to about 900 during his first two years of collaboration with the KGB. He was further credited with killing 20 anti-Soviet Afghans. In 1982, *Kaskad* won the cooperation of four more groups who operated in ways similar to Chungar.[62] By the beginning of 1983, there were 86 groups that the KGB called "false bands" operating in Afghanistan. They posed as Mujahedin and disrupted the actions of the genuine resistance movement.[63] In an effort to maintain their cover, DRA intelligence would allow them to attack some prewarned government outposts to loot weapons and ammunition.[64]

Further, the KGB and KHAD agents infiltrated the Mujahedin field units and their political parties in Pakistan through the refugee networks. They not only collected information but carried out plans to intensify rifts between competing groups and factions and incite internal fighting. In the early 1980s, KGB agents forged letters supposedly issued by Gulboddin Hekmatyar and Mawlawi Mohammadi disparaging and undermining each other.[65] The forgery intensified the dispute between the Islamist Hekmatyar and the traditional Muslim cleric Mohammadi. Other similar acts of subversion by the KGB and the KHAD continued throughout the war.

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Examples of Major Combined Operations—1980–1989,
Part 1: Military Operations in the Panjsher Valley

During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the Mujahedin base in the Panjsher Valley became a major stronghold of the Afghan resistance. First of all, the 70-mile-long Hindu Kush Valley snakes through difficult mountainous terrain with limited access to the outside. As a natural fortress with two main gates—one in the south opening to the Kohistan plain north of Kabul and the other opening to a network of alpine valleys and roads connecting Panjsher to the eastern access roads to Pakistan through Nuristan and Chitral and the northern provinces through the historical Khawak Pass—the valley became a safe haven and a secure base of operation for the Mujahedin. Second, the Panjsher Valley is located near the Kabul-Salang highway, the main supply artery of the Soviet forces. From their bases in the Panjsher Valley, the Mujahedin constantly attacked Soviet and DRA convoys moving on the highway. Third, under Commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, one of the best-organized and better-trained Mujahedin forces was created in the Panjsher, which inspired the resistance forces in other areas.

In order to bring a sense of order and provide services in the “liberated areas,” Massoud established a civil-military administration in the Panjsher Valley. He later expanded this to other districts in the northern provinces. The area under his control in Panjsher was divided into 22 *qarargah* (bases) governed by a military commander and a civilian administrator. Each of these divisions was served by a judge and a prosecutor and provided with different committees to perform functions related to economic, education, health, and cultural affairs.[66] His military organization was based on

building capacities to defend the home turf and launch offensive operations against the enemy in and out of the valley. The Mujahedin were organized into three main categories including the *Mahali* (local) groups for the defense of the villages and other installations and key points, the *Zarbati* (striking) detachments, which operated as mobile reserve forces for the defense of various strongholds when they came under enemy attack, and the *Mutaharek* (mobile) detachments, which were lightly equipped, commando-like formations used to conduct hit-and-run attacks outside Panjsher, sometimes as far as 100 kilometers from their base.[67] The number of Massoud's Mujahedin fighters increased over time from about 1,000 in 1980 to 2,200 in mid-1981 to 5,000 in 1984 and up to 13,000 in 1989.

Being strongly obsessed with the Panjsher and its Mujahedin commander Massoud, the Soviets invaded the valley six times in two and a half years and launched the greatest invasion of the valley in 1984 (the seventh operation) following a yearlong cease-fire.

The initial Soviet military action against the Mujahedin forces in the Panjsher Valley was mounted four months after the occupation of Afghanistan.[68] The attacking force was organized into two groups moving from two converging directions—a ground attack column from Onaba in the south and an air-landed assault battalion at Passy-Shahi Mardan in the north.[69] As the Mujahedin were taken by surprise, there was little initial resistance, causing heavy losses on the defenders. During the next nine months the Soviets and DRA forces entered three times into the valley[70] to relieve the district center, Rukha, which was garrisoned by the DRA's 32nd Regiment of the 8th Division. The garrison had come under increasing Mujahedin pressure, forcing its evacuation in a rescue operation involving two regiments from the 108th Motorized Rifle Division. Thus by the end of 1980, Panjsher was once again free of the enemy presence.[71] When the

fighting season began in the spring of 1981, another attempt was made to reestablish Soviet and DRA control in the valley. The invading force penetrated only 25 kilometers into the valley, but it was forced to retire after having suffered some 100 casualties.

The Main Offensive of 1982

The Soviets planned and launched a much wider offensive operation against Panjsher in 1982, which they considered one of their most successful operations against Massoud over the years. The offensive was planned in the spring, and the forces were deployed in the first part of May for the multidivisional operation that was conducted between May 16 and 28, 1982. The operation involved the commitment of the combined Soviet and DRA forces, including more than three Soviet motorized rifle regiments and two airborne assault regiments.[72] They were supported by the combat support and service support elements of the 40th Army as well as by the Front and Army Aviation. The DRA components consisted of regiments from three divisions, subunits of the commando brigade, a separate infantry regiment, and subunits of the DRA state security KHAD forces. The total force numbered some 12,000 troops, two and a half times the known number of Mujahedin fighters in Panjsher, with more than 320 armored vehicles (tanks, infantry fighting vehicles [BMPs], and armored personnel carriers), 155 guns and mortars, 104 helicopters, and several Soviet and DRA air force combat aircraft squadrons.

The concept of operation envisioned launching a main attack up the Panjsher Valley in the northeast from Bagram to Evim with a diversionary thrust along the Ghorband Valley to the northwest—in the opposite direction. The operational space covered an area 60 kilometers in width and 220 kilometers in depth. The average advance was expected to be 15 to 18 kilometers per day. The operational formation

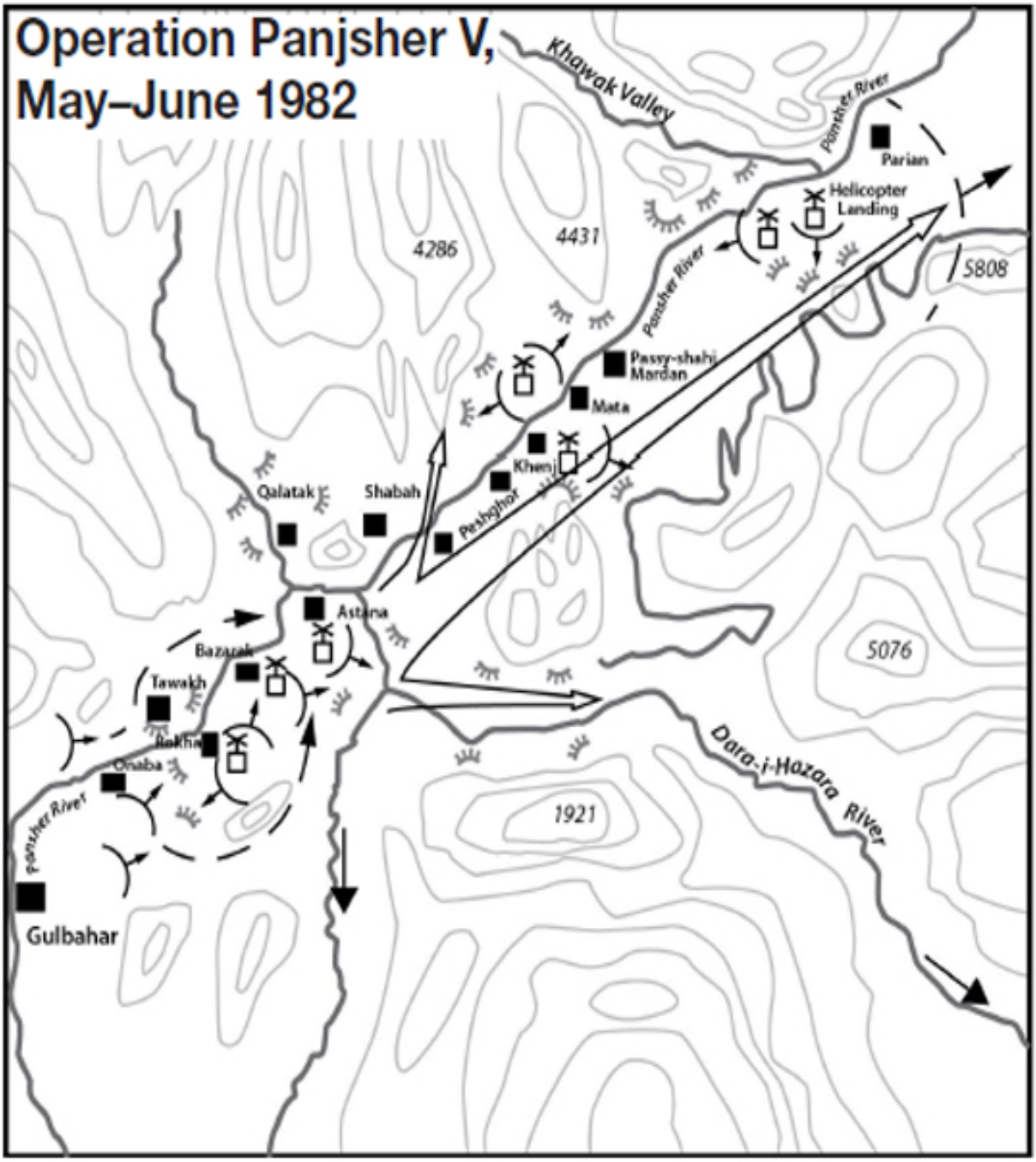
included the usual elements of a first echelon, the combined arms reserve, the artillery group, a Special Forces element, and the rear services. The air echelon was an independent element of 20 Soviet and Afghan aviation squadrons (240 helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft). The combat action on the main axis in Panjsher was a combination of a ground attack and an air assault landing in the depth of the valley, which would be synchronized with the advancing infantry under the constant cover of artillery fire and air strikes.

The Panjsher offensive was planned and directed by an operational group under the chief of staff of the 40th Army. In order to achieve surprise, a deception plan was carefully carried out to give the Mujahedin the impression that the main attack was intended to be launched in the Ghorband Valley. Unit movements were made in that direction to convince the Panjsheris to this effect. In the interest of secrecy, the actual plan was not shared with the Afghan forces, which were told that the attack was going to be launched up the Ghorband Valley toward Bamian. As expected, this disinformation was leaked to the Mujahedin, who shifted their forces from other areas to Ghorband.

The operation began on May 15, 1982, and was carried out in four phases. In the first phase, on May 15 and 16, diversionary actions took place in the Ghorband Valley, moving from the concentration area between Bagram and the Hindu Kush foothills. The move masked the direction of the main attack and covered the deployment of the main forces into the area of Bagram and Charikar for the operation against Panjsher. Rumors spread about the upcoming battle in Ghorband, while troop units moved to that area and some DRA units launched fire strikes on targets in the area. The deception worked, as the Afghan resistance forces hastily began shifting additional forces from other areas, including Panjsher, to the Ghorband axis.

The second phase of the operation lasted six days and began at 4:00 AM on May 17. On the eve of this phase, 11

reconnaissance groups infiltrated into the gorge and captured, without a fight, all the commanding heights dominating the entrance to the Panjsher Valley. The following night, a battalion of the Soviet 177th Motorized Rifle Regiment captured another important height, located 10 kilometers deep within the valley.



Operation Panjsher V, May–June 1982.

After massive air strikes along the entire length of the valley, followed by an artillery preparation targeting the disclosed strong points, two forward Soviet battalions advanced on foot along the crowning heights on both sides

of the valley while a third Soviet battalion moved dismounted through the valley on the Rukha-Bazarak axis with their armored vehicles (*bronnegruppa*) covering the advance of the infantry on the crowning heights of the gorge. At 5:00 AM, one hour after the beginning of the advance, one Soviet motorized rifle battalion and one DRA infantry battalion were air-landed near the villages of Rukha and Bazarak. In spite of air strikes on the landing zone to neutralize the enemy air defense capability and block its interference with the landing operation, the Mujahedin shot down two helicopters at Rukha. This forced the Soviet command to use more air bombardment and machine gun strafing by fighter jets and combat helicopters to soften up the landing zones. During the first day of the second phase of the operation, three Soviet and three Afghan battalions, with a total number of 1,200 soldiers, air-landed about 40 to 50 kilometers into the valley to surround Mujahedin strongholds and seize control of the terrain dominating them. While the air-landed troops blocked the targeted villages and strongholds, the Afghan troops and state security agents entered the area to search for weapons and explosives and detain suspected persons. Their operation was coordinated with the advance of the ground columns, which moved at a rate of seven to 10 kilometers per day. This meant that some of the air-landed units had to fight in their isolated area for several days, until the ground columns linked up with them. On the second day of the operation, the army reinforced the advancing columns by air-landing one Soviet and one DRA battalion at Mata to prevent the withdrawal of the Mujahedin to the east and to block the arrival of reserves from the Andarab Valley north of the Hindu Kush.

On the following days, the successive air-landing of troops in the depth of the valley broke the integrity of the Mujahedin forces. On the third day (May 19), one Soviet and one DRA battalion landed in the Astana region and an equal-sized force was air-landed around Mata. The air assault

landings continued on the fourth day, when two Soviet and two DRA battalions air-landed in the Evim region at a depth of 70 miles in the valley. Thus, during four days, the army inserted 65 battalions by helicopter into the rear of the Mujahedin formations.[73] The action of the air-landed detachments in the depth of the valley and their engagement of the defenders in heavy fighting facilitated the advance of the ground troops, which moved in column formations behind the advance guards and the usual movement support detachments, which cleared mines and explosives. Meanwhile, the self-propelled artillery provided fire support. Under the pressure of massive artillery and air strikes, the Mujahedin groups moved into side valleys and mountain positions and set ambushes as they were pursued by the enemy columns. They survived heavy artillery strikes by taking cover during the fire and resurfacing when the fire was over. During this period, the clashes with the separate Mujahedin groups developed into several hotspots along the valley. In almost each combat area, the well-entrenched Mujahedin forces were dealt with by conducting a 26- to 30-minute artillery preparation fire on each target with at least one battery firing between 40 and 120 rounds on that target, followed by frontal and flanking assaults by infantry.[74] The wide use of tactical air assault facilitated achieving surprise and forced the Mujahedin to fight under conditions tactically unfavorable to them. In one incident, a Soviet air assault battalion was encircled by the Mujahedin at Rukha. The beleaguered Soviet paratroopers were rescued by a motorized rifle battalion under the command of Major Aushev, which broke through the Mujahedin defense and captured Rukha and linked up with the paratroopers. For courage and heroism in this task, the battalion commander was awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union.

A Western journalist watching the offensive later wrote,

> when columns of Soviet armored vehicles began entering the valley Massoud ordered his men to let them pass in an attempt to stretch them out as much as possible before striking with mortars and RPG-7 rocket launchers. In the first 10 days of the offensive, some 50 vehicles were destroyed in the Panjsher, possibly as many as 35 [!] helicopters and MIGs shot down, and large numbers of weapons and ammunition captured. This included over 100 AK-74 assault rifles, several mortars, heavy machine guns and antitank guns. . . . Latest resistance reports indicate that the Soviet and Afghan government forces have suffered as many as 3,000 dead and wounded.[75]

By the end of the second phase, the entire valley was cleared of active Mujahedin forces, and the army initiated the third phase of the operation (May 22–24). The purpose of this phase was to seal off the northern end of the valley, where several roads and valleys from Pakistan through Nuristan and the Andarab Valley on the northern foothill of the Hindu Kush intersected. Following some 130 air sorties (that began even a week before the initiation of the operation to destroy the Mujahedin forces in the intended landing zones), one Soviet and one DRA battalion air-landed at Evim and secured the road junction at the top of the valley. This ended the third phase of the operation, and the army made preparations for the fourth and the last phase, which was the organized withdrawal of the bulk of the forces from the valley after garrisoning the key points. At the beginning of June 1982, the combined Soviet and DRA forces began withdrawal from the valley. Rukha and Onaba were garrisoned by Soviet troops, which established outposts on the high ground overlooking the main valley between Onaba and Rukha. The population centers and the northeast section of the valley were held by the Afghan troops.

During the operation the Soviets took 200 prisoners and seized documents, including lists of 5,200 party members of the DRA with their photos and personal information as well as a list of 113 active members of the Mujahedin underground in Kabul, some of whom were arrested by the regime.[76] Other captured materials included Ahmad Shah Massoud’s diary, documents about Mujahedin groups

operating on the Salang-Kabul highway and in the green zones of Parwan Province, and documents confirming the relationship among the Mujahedin forces in the Ghorband, Panjsher, Tagao, Nejrao, Salang, and Kabul suburbs. There were also plans of action against the government and Soviet troops in the coming years and lists of persons subject to physical elimination in the region.

As a result of successive military operations, the Soviet and DRA forces established several main garrisons in the Panjsher Valley, including Onaba, Rukha, Bazarak, Peshghor, Saricha, Barjman, and numerous outposts at key locations. But as soon as the attacking forces retired from the valley, the enemy garrisons were constantly threatened by the Mujahedin groups as they recovered from the pressure of the invading forces.

The Temporary Truce

In January 1983 both parties agreed to a temporary truce, which was negotiated by Massoud in person with a colonel of the GRU, Anatoly Tkachev; the agreement stipulated that Soviet troops should evacuate the Panjsher, except for a small garrison at Onaba, whose access was controlled by the Mujahedin.[77] The area covered by the ceasefire included the Panjsher Valley, but not the Salang Pass, where fighting continued. The Soviets made the commitment to not launch air strikes on Panjsher and to allow the free movement of convoys in and out of the valley.

Taking advantage of the truce, Massoud replenished the depleting ranks of his army, which had suffered from continued fighting, and rebuilt his defensive network in the Panjsher Valley.[78] Massoud’s truce with the Soviets was criticized by some other Mujahedin parties, particularly by Hekmatyar’s Hezb-e Islami, on the grounds that the agreement increased Soviet and DRA pressure on their forces in the area. The one-year truce expired in early 1984,

and neither side showed interest in renewal. In the Soviet Union, with the ascension of Konstantin Chernenko to power in February 1984, the mood in Moscow changed against the truce with the rebels—a position also shared by Babrak Karmal. The post-truce Soviet offensive operation in Panjsher in April 1984, involving 11,000 Soviet and between 2,600 and 5,000 DRA soldiers supported by 200 aircraft and 190 helicopters,[79] had mixed results. Massoud, who was alerted by his agents inside the regime about the upcoming major operation two weeks ahead of time, decided to evacuate the 100,000 inhabitants of the valley and move them to safer areas in the side valleys. He left a small group of his troops to mislead the enemy by conducting some demonstration movements. Although the Soviets occupied the Panjsher Valley and threatened the valley from the north through the lower Andarab Valley, they failed to destroy the main resistance forces, as they had evacuated the main axis of the enemy offensive.[80]

The Soviets declared this a major victory, which was celebrated in Kabul and Moscow with much fanfare. As a result of the operation, much of the valley was occupied and some of the infrastructure that the Mujahedin had created during the truce period was destroyed. The Soviet and DRA forces reestablished five main garrisons in the valley at Onaba, Rukha, Bazarak, Peshghor, and Shabah in addition to smaller posts. A series of smaller Soviet and DRA follow-up military actions marked the end of major military operations in Panjsher after its key areas were occupied and held by the DRA forces. However, intermittent Mujahedin attacks on regime garrisons in the valley continued for another four years before the withdrawal of the Soviet forces.

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Examples of Major Combined Operations—1980–1989,
Part 2: Offensive Operations on the Zhawar Base

Zhawar, a mountain canyon in the eastern Afghan Province of Khost, was turned by the Mujahedin into a logistics transfer base, a training camp, and a staging area in the early 1980s.[81] Located about four kilometers from the Pakistani border, the base was easily supplied from the forward Mujahedin depots in Miranshah, 15 kilometers to the east, and rapidly reinforced by the Mujahedin forces from across the border. The Mujahedin under Mawlawi Jalaluddin Haqani had developed the base into a honeycomb of 11 caves and tunnels carved into the canyon walls, some extending to 500 meters. The underground facility contained living areas, weapons and ammunition depots, a mosque and guesthouse, a garage and repair shop, and a radio broadcast transmitter. A diesel-power generator illuminated the tunnel and powered appliances. The base was manned by a 500-man regiment with a Soviet D-30 122 mm howitzer, two tanks captured from the DRA in previous clashes, some six BM-12 Chinese multiple-rocket launchers (MRL), and some machine guns and small arms. A Mujahedin air defense company defended Zhawar with five ZGU-1 and four ZGU-2 antiaircraft 14.5 mm heavy mountain machine guns. The camp was defended by a system of fortifications prepared on the surrounding high ground.

Zhawar I

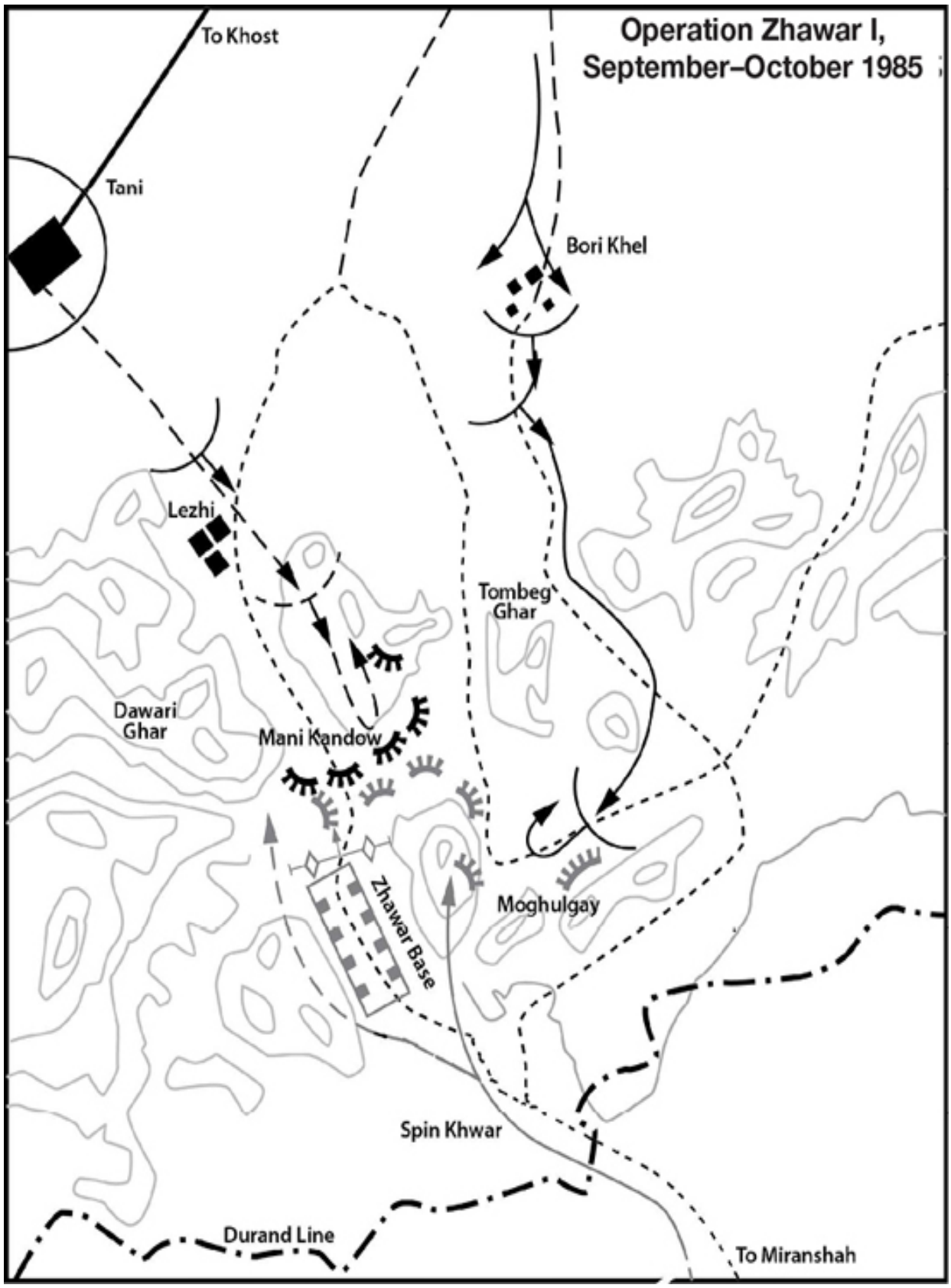
In 1985, the Soviet and DRA forces launched several major offensive operations to reduce the Mujahedin base camps that served as staging areas and the logistic support of the

Mujahedin military operations. Zhawar had become one of the symbols of the Afghan resistance in the eastern provinces. In August 1985, the Soviets and the DRA decided to attack and destroy the base. Under the close support of the Soviet air force, the DRA 12th Infantry Division from Gardez, with elements of the 37th and 38th Commando Brigades, was ordered to move from Gardez on a circuitous road through Jaji Maidan to Khost since the direct route through the Sata-Kandow Pass had been under Mujahedin control since 1979. In Khost, elements of the 25th Infantry Division joined the forces. In September, the combined grouping under General Shahnawaz Tanai launched an attack supported by heavy artillery fire and air strikes on Bori, which is northeast of Zhawar. Zhawar was not prepared for this attack since most of its major commanders, including Haqani, were on a pilgrimage to Mecca (the *Haj*). The DRA recaptured Bori and drove on to Zhawar. An 80-man Mujahedin detachment took up a blocking position on the eastern slope of the Moghulgay Mountains, which form the eastern wall of the Zhawar base. In the ensuing clashes the DRA attacking units were pushed back and forced to return to Khost. The Mujahedin recaptured Bori.

Shortly after, the DRA renewed its attack from Tani on a new axis northwest of the base. The attacking troops recaptured the town of Lezhi from the Mujahedin and killed Commander Mawlawi Ahmad Gul. At this point, September 4, major Mujahedin commanders returned to Pakistan from the *Haj* and hurried north to Zhawar to take command. The Mujahedin from Lezhi retreated south while a 20-man Mujahedin force blocked the Manay Kandow Pass. The pass is dominated by a high peak, which is capped with a thick rock slab. Under the slab was a natural cave, which the Mujahedin improved. The cave could accommodate the 20 Mujahedin during artillery and air strikes. The Mujahedin also dug communications trenches so that they could quickly reoccupy their fighting positions once the firing stopped. The

firing positions dominated the Tani plain and were well positioned to stop any infantry attack. From there the Mujahedin repulsed repeated DRA attacks, which were supported by heavy air strikes and artillery fire. On September 14, when their position was beaten hard and became untenable, the Mujahedin blocking detachment fell back and the DRA advanced and seized the high ground within a kilometer of Zhawar base.

Then something dramatic happened that sealed the fate of the battle. As the overconfident DRA troops on the heights commanding the Mujahedin position saw the base within their reach, the Mujahedin moved their only two tanks, the trophies of an earlier combat, and opened fire on the DRA observation posts on the heights and destroyed them with their first shots. The tanks then engaged the enemy troops with effective fire. Taken by surprise and shocked by the destruction of their position, the DRA troops fell back, maneuvering to the east where they were stopped by the Mujahedin blocking positions, which they held for the next five days. Shahnawaz Tanai’s attempts to renew the attack failed as the Mujahedin held their own and new reinforcements reached the base from areas as far as Jalalabad and Urgon. The situation forced the DRA forces to break contact and withdraw at night after 42 days of fighting. The Mujahedin losses included 106 dead and 321 wounded. The DRA losses were heavy, but their numbers are unknown.


Operation Zhawar I,
September–October 1985
To Khost
Tani
Bori Khel
Lezhi
Tombeg
Ghar
Dawari
Ghar
Mani Kandow
Zhawar Base
Moghulgay
Spin Khwar
Durand Line
To Miranshah

Operation Zhawar I, September–October 1985.

Zhawar II

The DRA failure at Zhawar raised the profile of the Mujahedin and lowered the morale of the Kabul regime and its Soviet backers. About five months later, after the Soviet leadership had made the political decision to leave Afghanistan, following the political stabilization of the country, the DRA Ministry of Defense, with the concurrence of General Varennikov, and the Soviet Defense Ministry's Operational Group in Kabul decided to launch a combined DRA-Soviet offensive operation against the Zhawar base. It was planned that the offensive would be conducted by elements of four DRA infantry divisions, one commando brigade, and one air assault regiment supported by artillery and aviation.[82] The force consisted of some 54 understrength DRA combat battalions joined by at least two Soviet motorized rifle regiments (five battalions) and backed by air and artillery assets. The jointly planned operation was under the command of the DRA deputy minister of defense, Lieutenant General Nabi Azimi, and the Soviet advisor, Major General Trofimenko.[83] The combat formation was constituted into two groupings of forces. The eastern group included the 7th and 14th Infantry Divisions and the 666th Air Assault Regiment. The western group consisted of the 8th and 25th Infantry Divisions. The 38th Commando Brigade was tasked with making an air assault, landing onto Dawri Ghar Mountain, which rose 3,600 meters above sea level and dominated the Zhawar canyon.

The DRA forces, covered by Soviet aviation, left Gardez on February 28, 1986, traveling over a circuitous route via Jaji Maidan to the combat zone, and concentrated at a staging area northwest of Khost for a month before the 25th Division moved to secure the Naray Pass, allowing the DRA forces to descend on the Khost Valley during rainy and windy weather

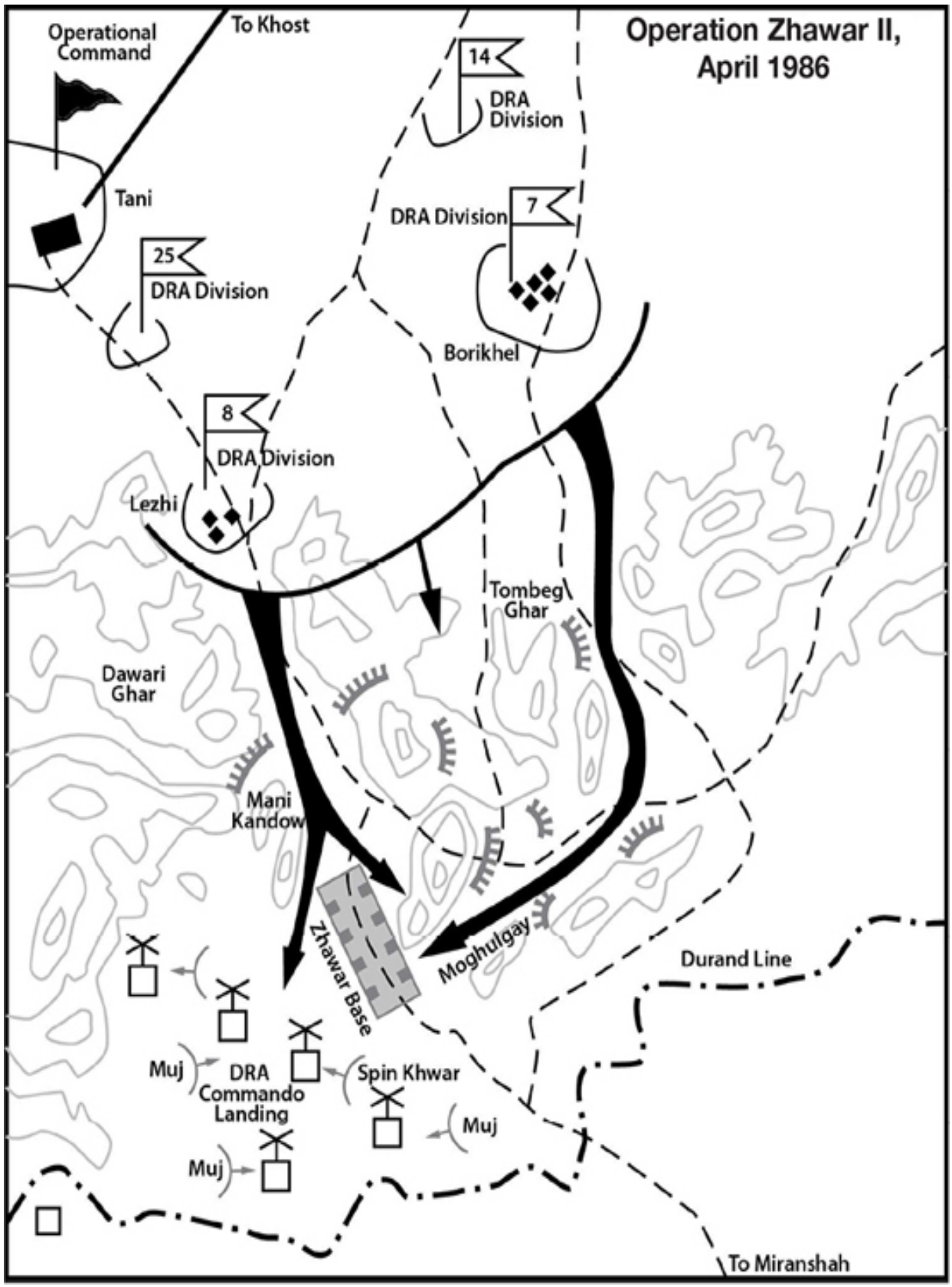
and prepare for the operation. At this time, the 7th Infantry Division was in the east with the 14th Infantry Division following, and the 8th Infantry Division was in the west with the 25th Infantry Division following. Around midnight on April 2, the DRA began a two-hour artillery and aviation preparation of the target area. Then six Mi-8 armed helicopters flew from Khost airfield to insert the initial assault group of the 38th Commando Brigade. The commandos landed without opposition, but the ground assault ran into immediate, heavy resistance from the Mujahedin defending Dawri Ghar Mountain. The ground advance was forced to halt. The command post for the operation had moved from Khost to Tani and was in radio contact with the initial air assault group, and it found that the commandos had landed some five kilometers inside Pakistan, beyond the base at Zhawar. Soon they were surrounded and locked in combat with the Mujahedin. The air assault was botched, and the DRA command worsened the situation by committing the rest of the brigade to combat–not onto the Dawri Ghar Mountain landing zone, which was well populated with Mujahedin, but onto the open areas around Zhawar itself.

It was at this point when Mawlawi Nezamuddin Haqani in the Zadran area saw approximately 20 transport helicopters flying over. He radioed the commanders at Zhawar and warned them. He expected that the helicopters would land at Lezhi or Darakai. After his radio message, he saw another group of helicopters, including some heavy-transport helicopters, flying the same direction. These were escorted by jet fighters. He again radioed this information to Zhawar. Zhawar had 700 to 800 Mujahedin combatants, plus air defense forces, at the time. However, Jalaluddin Haqani, the Zhawar commander, was at Miranshah. Mawlawi Haqani also radioed this information separately to Jalaluddin Haqani, who set out immediately for Zhawar.[84] Being alerted to the enemy’s upcoming landing, the Mujahedin rushed to the expected landing area. The rest of the 38th Commando

Brigade instead landed on seven dispersed landing zones around Zhawar. There were 15 helicopters in the first lift, which landed at 7:00 AM. More lifts followed to get the entire brigade on the ground. Some of the landing zones were within a kilometer of the Pakistani border. Most of the helicopters landed on the high ground to the west of Zhawar. Mujahedin gunners destroyed many helicopters while they were on the ground. Then the Mujahedin went on the offensive and attacked the landing zones. They quickly overran four landing zones and captured many of the DRA commandos. Reinforcements moved from Miranshah to Zhawar and took the commandos from the rear. The commandos were trapped between two forces and were killed or captured. By the end of the day, the Mujahedin captured 530 commandos from the 38th Brigade.

Meanwhile, Soviet aircraft with smart munitions made ordnance runs on the caves. Since the caves faced southeast toward Pakistan, the Soviet aircraft overflew Pakistan in order to turn and fly at the southern face with the smart weapons. Smart missiles hit the first western cave and killed 18 Mujahedin outright. Smart missiles hit the second western cave and collapsed the cave opening, trapping some 150 Mujahedin inside. This second cave was 150-meters long and used as the radio transmission bunker. The commander, Jalaluddin Haqani, who had just arrived from Miranshah, was among those trapped in the second cave. Soviet bombers followed the attack of the aircraft with conventional ordnance. They dropped tons of bombs and, in so doing, blasted away the rubble blocking the cave entrances. The trapped Mujahedin escaped. The battle for the remaining landing zones continued. There was one group of commandos on high ground who held out for three days before they were finally overrun. The chief of counter-reconnaissance in one of the commando battalions managed to exfilarate and lead 24 of the commandos to the safety of

their own forces. It took eight days. Of the 32 helicopters assigned to the mission, only eight survived.


Operation Zhawar II,
April 1986
Operational Command
To Khost
14
DRA Division
Tani
DRA Division
7
25
DRA Division
Borikhel
8
DRA Division
Lezhi
Tombeg Ghar
Dawari Ghar
Mani Kandow
Zhawar Base
Moghulgay
Durand Line
Muj
DRA Commando Landing
Spin Khwar
Muj
Muj
To Miranshah

Operation Zhawar II, April 1986.

In the following days the situation for the Soviet and DRA forces became more difficult. Having failed to link up with the already-destroyed air assault force, the first echelon divisions (the 7th and 14th infantry Divisions) pulled back to their start points at the end of April 9 after exhausting their ammunition. The 25th Infantry Division, located in the second echelon, covered the western flank, the artillery positions, and the corps rear area. The 14th Infantry Division covered the eastern flank. The DRA had regarrisoned Lezhi since Zhawar I and had continued to fight for possession of the Manay Kandow Pass for some 10 days while the Mujahedin holding the Manay Kandow checked their advance. Meanwhile, the Mujahedin attacked the DRA lines of communication and the airfield at Khost.

According to Soviet sources, General Varennikov sent a message to the Soviet minister of defense, Marshal Sokolov, criticizing the leadership of DRA forces and outlining his plan to reinforce the effort with three DRA regiments, a DRA Spetsnaz battalion, and six Soviet battalions. He noted General Azimi's replacement as operations commander and requested time to resupply and prepare the force to resume the offensive. Marshal Sokolov responded with a stern reply and gave Varennikov twelve days to prepare for the resumption of the operation.[85]

Following a reshuffle of the field command groups, the Soviet and DRA military leadership planned the renewal of the operation. One reinforcing regiment from the DRA 11th and 18th Infantry Divisions and the DRA 21st Mechanized Infantry Brigade each arrived along with the DRA 203rd Separate Spetsnaz Battalion and the DRA 37th Commando Brigade. Following urgent requests from the leadership of the DRA, Varennikov authorized five battalions of Soviet forces, which were sent to Khost and Tani between April 5 and 9. Soviet forward air controllers were assigned to work with

Afghan forward air controllers in the infantry divisions, and the reinforcing Soviet unit
commanders were assigned to work with the Afghan division commanders.

Lieutenant General Azimi was replaced by Major General Abdul Ghafur, and the chief of staff of the 40th Army, General-Major Grekov, took command of the five Soviet battalions. General-Lieutenant Grishin assumed overall coordination of all the forces. They reworked the operations plan while the force was refitted. The total DRA and Soviet force now exceeded 6,600 men. DRA president Karmal had requested that the general of the army, Varennikov, take over as overall commander of the operation. During the preparation for the renewed offensive, the Soviets kept the pressure on the Mujahedin with air strikes and artillery. In the first battle for Zhawar, DRA and Soviet artillery and air strikes stopped at night, but this time they played around the clock. At night, they dropped aerial flares for illumination. Pakistan air space was violated several times. This heavy fire support continued for 12 days. The tempo of the air and artillery increased on the morning of April 17. The Mujahedin's newly supplied British Blowpipe shoulder-fired air defense missiles were not effective. Pakistan sent some officers into Zhawar during the fighting to take out attacking aircraft with the British Blowpipe shoulder-fired missiles and show the Mujahedin how to use them. After climbing a mountain and firing 13 Blowpipe missiles to no avail, a Pakistani captain and his NCO were severely wounded by the attacking aircraft, and they were evacuated to a military hospital in Pakistan.[86]

The renewed ground attack began on the morning of April 17. The 25th Infantry Division led the assault in the west, and the 14th Infantry Division led the assault in the east. In order to mislead the Mujahedin and divert their forces, the eastern group began its attack at 6:30 AM and the western

group began at 10:30 AM. The 25th Infantry Division was concentrated at Lezhi. The Mujahedin had fortified the Dawri Ghar Mountain and could cover the majority of the slopes with accurate fire. Multiple attacks on the mountain failed. When the artillery fire preparation started, the Mujahedin sheltered in caves, and when the preparation ceased, they reoccupied their firing positions and repulsed the attack. Major General Asef, the DRA 25th Infantry Division commander and Lieutenant Colonel Mikhail Karaev, his adviser, observed this. During the night, they silently moved one of their regiments toward the summit and, at dawn, launched an attack on the Mujahedin without any artillery preparation. Taken by surprise, the Mujahedin gave way. The regiment captured the summit in a matter of minutes as the Mujahedin fell back from the Lezhi area into the higher mountains, and slowly the DRA and the Soviet force moved through the Manay Kandow Pass.

At the same time, the DRA and the Soviet force launched a flanking column from the Lezhi area that moved to the east. This column moved toward Moghulgay Mountain on the east flank of Zhawar. There, a regiment of Hizb-e Isami (HIG) Mujahedin waited in defense. However, as the DRA column neared, the HIG regiment withdrew without a fight. At the same time, Jalaluddin Haqani was wounded by attacking aircraft. He had head and facial wounds, but rumors spread among the Mujahedin that Haqani was dead. At this point, the Mujahedin evacuated Zhawar and moved high into surrounding mountains while the two DRA ground columns closed onto Zhawar. The Mujahedin were unable to evacuate most of the stores from Zhawar. They pulled out the two T-55 tanks and fought the advancing column for a while before abandoning the tanks in the foothills. Lieutenant Colonel Kulenin, the adviser to the commander of the DRA 21st Mechanized Brigade, and his political deputy were killed by a T-55 round. The Soviet and DRA forces entered Zhawar. It was noon on April 19, 1986.

They found the caves at Zhawar up to 1,000 meters long, four meters wide, and three meters high. The walls were faced with brick. The cave entrances were covered with powerful iron doors, which were painted in bright colors. There were 41 caves in all. All had electricity. Behind a fence was a mosque with a beautiful brick entrance and a hospital with new medical equipment manufactured in the United States. They even had an ultrasound machine, which the Soviets moved to the Khost hospital. There was nickel-plated furniture, including adjustable beds. There was a library with English-language and Farsi-language books. There was a bakery and by the entrance was a stack of fresh bread. In the storage area, there were metal shelving units where boxes of arms and ammunition were neatly stacked. Further on, there was a storage cave for mines. There was every kind of mine imaginable: antitank, antivehicular, and antipersonnel mines from Italy, France, the Netherlands, and Germany. Hand grenade and artillery simulators were stored separately. The demolition explosives of various types and detonators were stored in a separate cave. In the very furthest part of the base were repair and maintenance bays, complete with grease pits. There was a T-34 tank in one of them. The tank was serviced, fueled, and had new batteries. It started right up and drove out of the service bay. Above the storage caves was a beautiful building marked “Hotel.” There was overstuffed furniture inside, and the floors were covered with carpets. Many of the Soviet aircraft had worked this site over, and the hotel and caves were still intact.[87]

The Afghan soldiers began to loot the base. Even the two-meter-high brick facing wall was pulled down and hauled back to the 25th Infantry Division at Khost. The DRA had no intention of staying in Zhawar long enough for the Mujahedin to organize a counterattack. The Mujahedin were moving MRL up to the Pakistan border to fire on the communist forces.

Colonel Kutsenko was in charge of destroying Zhawar and had four hours to do so. So the sappers stacked about 200 antitank mines in the primary caves and rigged them for simultaneous electric detonation. Even if they had laid in 10 times more explosives, it would not have made any difference, since the force of the explosion would follow the path of least resistance and the caves would channel the force out the caves' mouths.[88] With the huge explosion the caves contents were blown out.

The combat soldiers were withdrawing as the sappers remained behind to mine the base. The work was hard and was complicated by the lack of time. The sappers had to depart before nightfall. At 5:00 PM hours, the command was given for the remaining force to leave and head for Tani. After 57 days of campaigning, the DRA held Zhawar for only five hours. In addition to the standard mines and booby traps, the communist forces planted seismic-detonated mines and sprinkled aerial-delivered butterfly bombs over the area. The Mujahedin returned to Zhawar on the following day. The first Mujahedin to enter the area were killed by seismic mines. The Mujahedin withdrew and fired mortars, BM12, and machine guns into the area to set off the seismic mines. Then they began the slow process of finding the rest of the mines manually. The Mujahedin pushed forward from Zhawar to retake Lezhi and other areas. Since the DRA was only in Zhawar for five hours, they did not manage to destroy the caves, but collapsed some entrances. Weapons that were stored in some of the caves were still intact and useable. Mujahedin casualties were 281 killed in action and 363 wounded in action. DRA and Soviet losses are unknown, but the Mujahedin reportedly destroyed 24 helicopters, shot down two jets, and captured 530 personnel of the 38th Commando Brigade. The Mujahedin held a field tribunal. Yunus Khales and other Mujahedin commanders were the judges. They tried and executed Colonel Qalandar Shah, the commander of the 38th Commando Brigade, and another

colonel who landed with the brigade to adjust artillery fire. There were 78 other officers among the prisoners. They were given a chance to confess to their crimes from different battles and then all the officers were executed. All the soldiers were given amnesty since they were conscripts who were forced to fight. The amnestied soldiers were asked to perform two years of labor service in exchange for the amnesty. They did their service in logistics and were “reeducated” and released after two years.

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Examples of Major Combined Operations—1980–1989,
Part 3: Operation Magistral

Toward the end of 1987 the largest military operation of the war was planned and carried out by the Soviet command. It was intended to open the Gardez-Khost highway, which had been blocked by the Mujahedin since March 1979. The multidivisional offensive operation was aimed at relieving the city of Khost, which was tightly besieged by the Mujahedin and was on the verge of falling. The 15,000 people of the city and the military garrison faced a dangerous shortage of food. Since the Soviet forces were on the threshold of withdrawal from Afghanistan, the spectacular show of force came as the last hurrah of the uneasy nine-year Soviet occupation of the country.

The direct Gardez-Khost road runs through the Sata-Kandow, which ascends approximately 2,000 feet from the Gardez river valley to its highest point and then winds down 4,000 feet to the floor of the Khost plain. The pass receives a high amount of snowfall in winter months, but is largely arid during the rest of the year. There is another road some four miles to the east of the Sata-Kandow highway that goes through the Saroti Pass and joins the main highway at Laka-tiga, some 15 miles to the south of the Sata-Kandow Pass. This is a poor road that passes through the Dari Khel branch of the Zadran tribe.

The Mujahedin, mostly affiliated with Khales Hezb-e Islami (HIK), under the overall command of Jalaluddin Haqani of the Zadran tribe and subgroup commanders, including Captain (later General) Gulzarak Zadran, Abdur Rahman Zadran, Mawlawi Nezamuddin Haqani, Mulah Ibrahim, Mulah Abdurrahman, and others, were in charge of different tribe- and clan-based sectors of operation within the area with the

main camp of the front based at the Sarana road junction connecting the Zadran Valley with Shahi-Kot Valley to the northwest.[89]

The Mujahedin were watching the enemy massing his forces and supplies in Gardez during November 1987, indicating that a major showdown was in the offing. The Soviet and DRA forces earmarked for the great offensive included elements of two Soviet Motorized Rifle Divisions (the 108th and the 201st), one Airborne Division (the 103rd), the 56th Separate Air Assault Brigade, the 345th Separate Parachute Assault Regiment, and other combat support and service units. The DRA contingent in the operation consisted of the elements of five infantry divisions (the 8th, 11th, 12th, 14th, and 25th divisions), the 15th Tank Brigade, and some special-purpose units and support elements. Additionally, there were ten *Tsarnadoy* battalions (forces of the Ministry of Interior).[90] In all, they numbered some 24,000 troops.

The operation developed in four phases. In the first phase, between November 21 and 27, the Soviet and DRA forces were concentrated outside of Gardez while negotiations were held with Jalaluddin Haqani and other tribal elders about letting the supply convoys move through the road to Khost. The DRA minister of tribal affairs, Suleiman Layeq, was leading the negotiation with the Haqani group through third parties consisting of tribal elders.[91] Both sides attached a lot of importance to the operation as a test of their strength, which caused the talks to fail. Meanwhile, preparations for the offensive continued with army, division, and regimental artillery groups and command posts dug in and commanders of units and subunits conducting reconnaissance and planning. The Soviets established forward bases at Dara and Zama and deployed their Division Artillery Groups (DAGs) near Dara and deployed their Army Artillery Group further back, south of Gardez. They also moved a maneuver force to Zama. During this phase, the Soviets and DRA troops

advanced to seize the approaches to the Saroti Pass, which controls the eastern road.

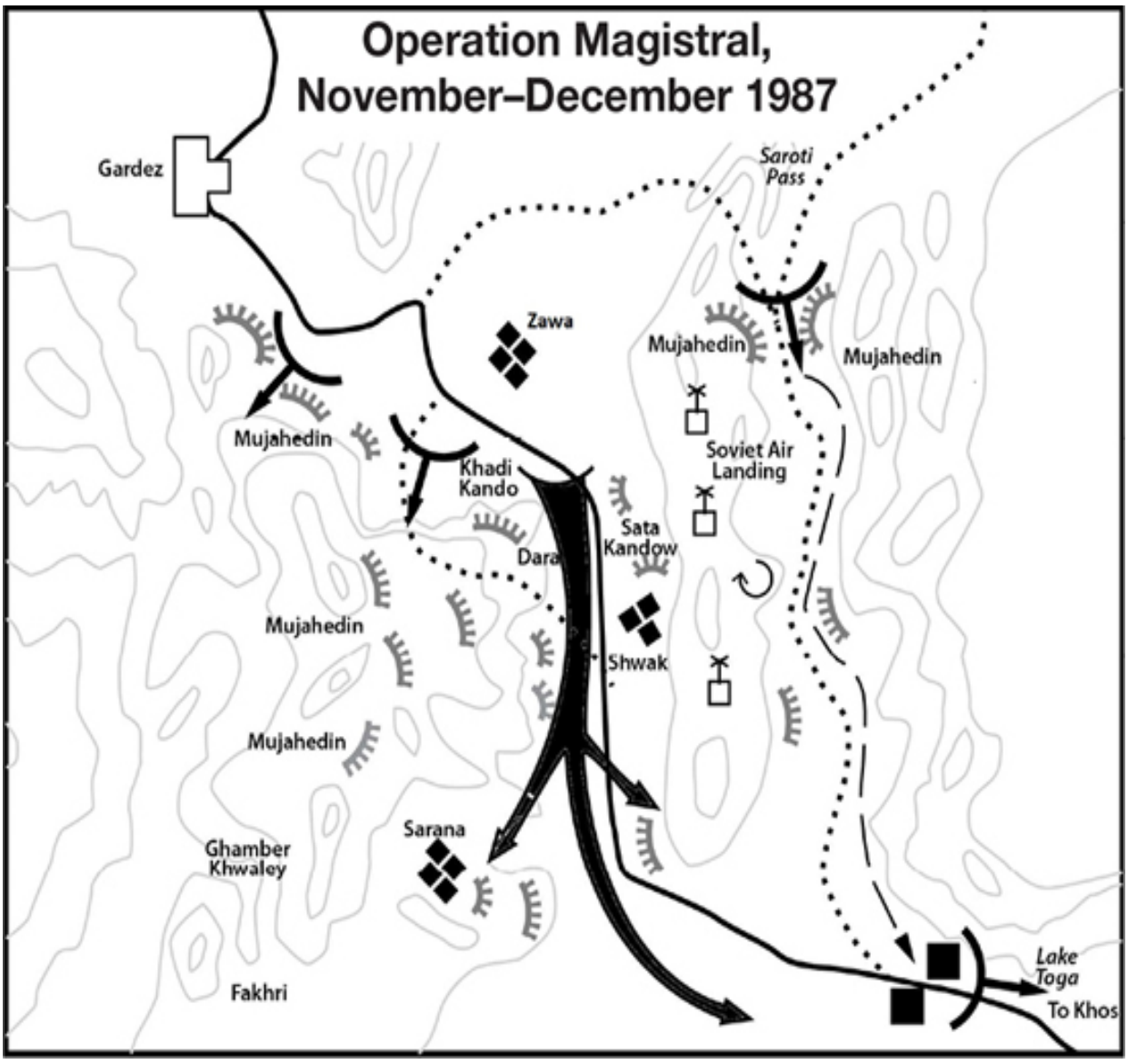
The Mujahedin focused their efforts to block the impending Soviet offensive on the Sata-Kandow Pass. They did not expect that the Soviets would want to move on the Saroti Pass, where the movement of vehicles was very limited, so the Mujahedin did not mine it and only reinforced the local Mujahedin on this axis. Each tribe sent *arbakai* (tribal militia) to help, and the main Mujahedin command sent about 300 *arbakai* as reinforcements to the Saroti Pass in the Dari Khel area. Commander Badshah commanded the Saroti approach.

On the Sata-Kandow axis, the shoulders of the pass loom some 400 meters over the road and, once in the pass, the road follows a slow, twisted route packed with sharp curves. It is an excellent place to defend. The resistance reinforced the minefields along the road and laid three mine belts on a three-kilometer front at the opening of the pass, with 300 to 400 meters between mine belts. The Mujahedin also reinforced positions on the high ground overlooking the road and the pass. There were a total of ten BM-12 multibarrel rocket launchers (MBRLs) available to Mujahedin in the area. They also capped the pass with ZGU-1 antiaircraft heavy machine guns. These were both good positional weapons but were very difficult to displace rapidly in the craggy terrain when the situation required. The defenders also had DShK[92] heavy machine guns, 75 mm and 82 mm recoilless rifles, and plenty of RPG-7s. Mawlawi Nezamuddin Haqani was the group commander and a deputy to Jalaluddin Haqani.[93]

The second phase of the operation began with the failure of talks to win the unhindered passage of trucks carrying nonmilitary peaceful cargo to Khost. On November 28, 1987, while a Soviet and DRA column suddenly launched an attack from Zawa toward the Saroti Pass, General Gromov, the commander of the 40th Army, conducted a fake parachute assault with dummy paratroopers on the Sata-Kandow Pass

to locate the firing positions of the Mujahedin on and around the pass. Mujahedin air defense positions and heavy machine guns opened up on the 20 dummy paratroopers. Reconnaissance aircraft then directed aviation strikes and a four-hour artillery barrage to destroy the Mujahedin disclosed positions. The assault on the Sata-Kandow axis, spearheaded by the Soviet 103rd Airborne Division under General-Major Grachev, failed, but the advance through the Saroti Pass succeeded. The Soviets air-landed air assault troops on the high ground between the two roads where air and artillery controllers called and adjusted fires on both axes.

The Zadrans in the villages had not immigrated to Pakistan, and Mujahedin, concerned about the danger to their families, left the fighting to evacuate their families to Pakistan. This exodus opened the way for the further advance of the Soviet troops. They were now ready for the main attack on the Sata-Kandow axis. They reopened their operation against the Sata-Kandow Pass with heavy air strikes and artillery fire while they moved their maneuver forces to Dara. On December 1, Soviet paratroopers and Afghan commandos, under the personal command of General-Major Sergei Grachev, took the Sata-Kandow Pass. This ended the second phase and was followed by a two-week lull to reopen negotiations with the tribes. A tribal *Jirga* was convened in Kabul and the minister for tribal affairs, Suleiman Layeq, a Ghilzai Pashtun from Paktika, representing the Afghan president, Najibullah, led the talks with Zadran tribal elders to secure safe passage of trucks carrying food, fuel, and other nonmilitary cargo to Khost.[94] During this time-out from battle, the Soviet command reinforced its advanced positions and made preparations for the continuation of the offensive if the talks failed. This came very soon, and the talks collapsed.



Operation Magistral, November–December 1987.

The fourth phase of the operation began on December 16 when the 40th Army and Afghan forces resumed the offensive. Their coordinated advance on two axes—the Sata-Kandow and the Saroti Pass—converging on Laka-Tiga knocked the Mujahedin off balance. Under the cover of effective air strikes controlled by observers placed on the high ground and heavy artillery pounding, the ground troops continued the advance through the sharp turns into the Zadran Valley, forcing the Mujahedin to withdraw up to the

mountains. Meanwhile, an Afghan Commando brigade and air assault battalion landed near Khost to link up with the besieged 25th Division. Then, in the predawn hours of December 23, following a heavy nighttime artillery barrage, the Soviet 345th Separate Airborne Assault Regiment made a bold attack on the Mujahedin main base at Sarana and captured it after heavy fighting.[95]

The fall of the base was a major setback to the Mujahedin, many of whom at this time had returned to the battlefield after taking their families to Pakistan. A fierce and bloody battle ensued, during which the Soviet paratroopers suffered heavy casualties but maintained their positions. One of the major events of this battle was the stubborn resistance of the regiment's 9th Company on a hill known as Hill 3234, where the 39-man unit repelled repeated attacks by 200 to 250 Mujahedin from two sides and, with the support of artillery fire, retained its position. The company sustained heavy casualties, with 6 men out of 39 killed and 28 injured. Two of the soldiers killed were posthumously awarded the golden star of the Hero of the Soviet Union, and all others paratroopers in this battle were given Orders of the Red Banner and Orders of the Red Star.

After the withdrawal of the Mujahedin into the mountains, the Soviet engineers removed mines and obstacles, and on New Year's Eve, the convoys carrying tons of supplies, including food, fuel, and ammunition, moved from Gardez and reached Khost. Until January 19, 1988, two to three convoys daily transported supplies from Gardez to Khost carrying a total amount of 24,000 tons.[96] On January 20, the withdrawal of the troops began. The Soviets and the DRA could only keep the road open for 12 days. When the Soviet air assault abandoned the heights, they took their weapons but left all the ammunition behind. The Mujahedin recaptured the road, and neither the DRA nor the Soviets could reopen it. Despite the intensity of the battle, Mujahedin casualties were light. There were perhaps some

100 Mujahedin killed in action. The villagers suffered greatly and the villages were heavily damaged or destroyed.[97]

The End Game

Official documents at the Main Operations Department of the Soviet Armed Forces General Staff indicate that by the end of February 1980, the Soviet leadership assumed that the new Afghan regime under Karmal had been well established and was contemplating the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. The plan was, however, postponed indefinitely for a number of reasons. At that time, they believed that the withdrawal would indicate submission to pressure from the Western-backed Afghan Mujahedin forces, thus damaging the image of the Soviet Union while strengthening the position of the United States and other Western countries in the region. Further, many believed that an early withdrawal risked the further destabilization of the situation in Afghanistan, which could result in the loss of Afghanistan to the Soviet Union and the rapid growth of Muslim extremism near the borders of the Soviet Union.[98] The alternative for the Soviet forces was getting heavily engaged in fighting with the Afghan resistance, which began in March 1980 with their operations in the Kunar Province and lasted for another nine years—a war that Soviet authors and many Western analysts claim initially did not figure in the Soviet Union's plans at all.[99] What is obvious is that the strength of the resistance in Afghanistan and the weakness and unpopularity of the Soviet-installed government in Kabul soon dashed the Soviet leadership's hopes for a short military involvement in Afghanistan.

In the next several years, while the war intensified and the Soviets were losing ground to the Mujahedin, the rapid changes of leadership in the Soviet Union caused by the death of secretary generals in relatively short intervals delayed any concrete decision on ending the war. Brezhnev

is said to have indicated interest in finding a way to withdraw from Afghanistan as early as May 1980.[100] His successor, Yuri Andropov, one of the staunch proponents of the Soviet military invasion of Afghanistan, and his KGB colleagues blamed foreign powers, particularly the United States and Pakistan, for arming the Mujahedin, which they believed was the cause of the Soviet setbacks in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, by spring 1983, Andropov privately accepted the need for a settlement that fell well short of a Soviet military victory. He told the UN secretary general, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, that the war was damaging the Soviet Union's relations with the West, "socialist states," Islamic states, and the rest of the third world as well as its internal social and economic development.[101] However, he told the Politburo in March 1983, "We are fighting against American imperialism. . . . That's why we cannot back off."[102]

Meanwhile, the UN-sponsored indirect talks between Afghanistan and Pakistan in Geneva, known as proximity talks, which began in 1982 and continued for several years with slow progress, became the forum aimed at bringing a peaceful resolution to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The ailing Andropov died in January 1984, and his successor, Konstantin Chernenko, could barely begin deciding on the Afghan war before he died in March 1985. The ascension of his successor, Mikhail Gorbachev, to power marked the turning point in the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, when the situation had become a stalemate. This also coincided with the rise of new thinking in Soviet military theory, spearheaded by Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, the chief of the Soviet Army General Staff. Known as the technological revolution in war or the introduction of a new generation of warfare, the new theory implied that the advent of high technology based on information technology had introduced revolutionary changes in the conduct of modern warfare, making conventional nonnuclear war unprecedentedly

effective and destructive. In his widely circulated treatise *Always Ready to Defend the Fatherland,* published in 1982, and in other writings, Ogarkov called for new conventional technology. He argued that the emergence of "new means of armed combat requires the improvement of existing forms of combat action" and that "bold experiments and solutions are necessary, even if this means discarding obsolete traditions, views, and propositions."[103]

The Soviet Union could hardly introduce such revolutionary change into its military doctrine unless it caught up with the high technological advances in the West, particularly in the United States, and unless it made major shifts in its economic and political policies, which later became the likely impetus for Gorbachev's Glasnost and Perestroika. The shifts of Moscow's policy toward Afghanistan should be seen in this context. In an interview in March 1983, Ogarkov told an American journalist, Leslie Gelb of the *New York Times*, that the "numbers of troops and weapons mean little." He said, "We cannot equal the quality of U.S. arms for a generation or two. Modern military power is based upon technology and technology is based on computers." In Moscow, unlike Washington, "we don't have computers in every office of the Defense Ministry." Ogarkov went on to insist that "we will never be able to catch up with you in modern arms until we have an economic revolution. And the question is whether we can have an economic revolution without a political revolution."[104]

It was in such an internal and external context, coupled with the Soviet Union's failure to win militarily in Afghanistan, that Gorbachev looked for different ways to deal with the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. He later wrote, "On taking office as General Secretary in 1985 I was immediately faced with an avalanche of problems. . . . We needed to withdraw from the damaging and costly war in Afghanistan."[105] At the Politburo on October 17, 1985,

Gorbachev told his colleagues that it was time to come to “a decision on Afghanistan,” meaning that it was necessary to find a way of bringing the war to an end. In spite of his firm desire to withdraw from Afghanistan, however, Gorbachev gave his forces a last chance to defeat the Mujahedin militarily. Robert Gates, then deputy director of Central Intelligence, wrote, “We saw new, more aggressive Soviet tactics, a spread of the war to the eastern provinces, attacks inside Pakistan and the more indiscriminate use of air power. These 18 months were the bloodiest of the war.”[106] Afterward, at the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress in February 1986, Gorbachev described the war in Afghanistan as “a bleeding wound.”

As part of his efforts to Afghanize the military conflict, Gorbachev saw the need for a change of the guard in Kabul to make the Moscow-backed government more effective and reform-oriented. By the spring of 1986, Gorbachev had decided on the replacement of Babrak Karmal as the Afghan leader with the much tougher but also more flexible head of the KHAD, Najibullah, who had the strong backing of the KGB. Early in May, Gorbachev bluntly told Karmal that he should hand over power to Najibullah and retire to Moscow with his family. There followed what Anatoly Dobrynin, the only other person present, described as a “painful” scene in which Karmal “obsequiously begged Gorbachev to change his mind, promising to perform his duties in a more correct and active way.”[107] Gorbachev refused, and Kabul Radio announced that the PDPA Central Committee accepted Babrak Karmal’s request to resign for “health reasons” and elected Najibullah to the post. Karmal was given the ceremonial position of president of the Revolutionary Council. Later, Karmal’s reluctance to cooperate led to his forced resignation from that post as well as from his membership in the Afghan Politburo.

A few months later, the fate of the Soviet war in Afghanistan was decided at the Soviet Politburo meeting of

November 13, 1986:

> “We have been fighting in Afghanistan for six years already,” said Gorbachev, “unless we change our approach, we shall continue to fight for another 20–30 years. . . . Our military should be told they are learning badly from this war. . . . Are we going to fight endlessly, as a testimony that our troops are not able to deal with the situation? We need to finish as quickly as possible.”[108]

Gorbachev gave two years to withdraw all Soviet troops, under the condition that it did not result in the Americans getting into the country. The transition time was aimed at preparing for a responsible pullout and ensuring that proper arrangements were in place for putting a good face on an apparent failure after a long war, particularly to save face vis-à-vis the West and the third world states. These measures included reaching a peace agreement in the context of the UN-led Geneva proximity talks, preparing the DRA to broaden the base of the government by including nonparty and traditional figures and groups through a national reconciliation drive, moderating government policies and de-ideologizing the ruling party and reaching out to leaders of the armed opposition and their neighbors, and finally building up the capacity of the DRA army to withstand the post-Soviet security threats.

The political decision by Gorbachev to withdraw the Soviet forces from Afghanistan invigorated the Geneva process after years of slow progress. A settlement was reached on April 14, 1988, between the Afghanistan government and Pakistan with the United States and the Soviet Union signing as guarantors. The accords consisted of several instruments on bilateral relations, including noninterference and nonintervention in each other’s affairs and not allowing their territories to be used against each other’s sovereignty and stability. The Afghan Mujahedin were not party to the Geneva accords, but it was assumed that Pakistan and the United States were representing the interests of the Afghan resistance. This gave political weight to Pakistan in the Geneva process. Iran refused to participate in the Geneva

negotiations on the grounds that the Afghan resistance was not represented. However, Iran agreed to be briefed by the UN mediator on the progress of the talks. The accord also stipulated a phased withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan between May 15, 1988, and February 15, 1989.[109] A bilateral agreement on the voluntary return of refugees was signed between the DRA and Pakistan. The agreement did not include Iran despite the fact that there were about 2.35 million Afghan refugees in Iran.[110] The exclusion of the Mujahedin caused them to refuse to accept the terms of the agreement, paving the way for the continuation of the war following the Soviet pullout.

In Afghanistan, Najibullah launched an ambitious program in December 1986, including a call for a cease-fire, for returning the Afghans from exile, and for holding talks with Mujahedin leaders to discuss the possibilities of forming a coalition government. He also sent feelers and emissaries to former Afghan king Zahir Shah in Rome to return and lead a national process of peace and reconciliation in the country. In order to offer tangible signs of moving away from the dominance of the Communist party, Najibullah changed the constitution by convening a *Loya Jirga* in November 1987 and assumed the presidency. The new constitution renamed the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) the Republic of Afghanistan (ROA) and adopted a multiparty government system with Islamic tenets as the legal basis of governance. The following year the Afghan Communist Party, the PDPA, changed its name to the Hezb-e Watan (Homeland Party) and non-Communists were brought into the government.

Meanwhile, the UN mediator, Diego Cordovez, made efforts through contacts with all the stakeholders to win support for the formation of a post-Soviet coalition government, pending elections in the future, through mechanisms acceptable to all parties, including convening a *Loya Jirga*, which was promoted by the former king and his supporters. On the other hand, the Soviet senior diplomat Yuli Vorontsov, the

first deputy foreign minister (1986–1990) who in 1988–1989 doubled as ambassador in Kabul, made the rounds talking to Mujahedin leaders and other stakeholders to get support for the peaceful transition in Afghanistan through the formation of a coalition government with the participation of the Kabul regime and the Mujahedin factions.

Neither of these efforts succeeded in reconciling the competing demands of Kabul, the divided Mujahedin factions, and the neighboring countries. The Mujahedin and their foreign backers felt that, with the withdrawal of the Soviet forces, the Kabul regime would immediately collapse, and they had little interest in entering into a deal with Kabul or Moscow for anything less than taking over the government. At the same time, Pakistan was keen on seeing the Kabul regime fall to the pro-Islamabad fundamentalist Mujahedin parties, particularly the Hezb-e Islami of Hekmatyar in order to ensure Pakistan's enduring influence in post-Communist Afghanistan.

All this time, the Soviet Union had to allay the concerns of their Afghan comrades about the risks of the Soviet pullout to the survival of the Kabul regime. But Moscow had made its decision and made arrangements to supply the Afghan security forces with sufficient arms and equipment to withstand the post-Soviet security threats. At the same time, the Kabul regime and Soviet intelligence exploited the division among the Afghan Mujahedin parties to pit them against one another and co-opt the Mujahedin field commanders. During the next two years an increasing number of Mujahedin major commanders made unwritten protocols with the regime and remained on the payroll of the Kabul government.[111]

In early April 1988, just days before the signing of the Geneva Accords and weeks before the beginning of the Soviet troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, the entire stockpile of arms and ammunition for the Afghan war, held at the ISI camp at Ojhri, near Rawalpindi, was destroyed. A

spectacular explosion demolished the entire 10,000-ton store, including 3,000 rockets, thousands of mortar bombs, millions of rounds of small-arm ammunition, large numbers of antitank mines, recoilless rifle ammunition, and Stinger missiles. The explosion killed 100 people and wounded over 1,000. The sudden fireworks sent rockets and shells flying as far as 12 miles around the Rawalpindi-Islamabad twin cities and caused major chaos.[112] If the explosion was planned and carried out by anti-Mujahedin forces, it was quite a blow on the eve of the withdrawal of the Soviet forces.

The withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan began on time and was conducted along two corridors—the eastern corridor of Ghazni-Gardez-Kabul-Pul-e Khomri-Termez to the Soviet Uzbekistan border and the western corridor that stretched from Kandahar-Shindand-Herat to Kushka on the Soviet Turkmenistan border. Prior to the official date of the withdrawal, in April and May 1988, troops from outlying garrisons, including Asadabad in Kunar, Jabal Seraj-Gulbahar in Parwan, Bamian, Baraki-Barak in Logar, Cheghcheran (now Feroz-Koh) in Ghor, and Shahjui in Zabul, were withdrawn to their parent regiments, brigades, and divisions. The first phase began on May 15 and lasted three months, during which some 50,000 troops (about 50 percent of all) left for home from nine major garrisons. This ended the presence of Soviet troops in Jalalabad, Ghazni, and Gardez in the east, Lashkargah and Kandahar in the west, and Faizabad and Kunduz in the northeast.[113] In this phase the combat support and combat service support units in Kabul were also withdrawn.[114] The second and final phase of the withdrawal began in December 1988 and ended on February 15, 1989, when all elements of the 40th Army returned home. During withdrawal process the Soviet army transferred part of its arms and equipment to the Afghan army. The total troops withdrawn included 110,000 personnel, 500 tanks, 4,000 Infantry Fighting Vehicles (BMPs) and armored personnel

carriers (BTR), 2,000 artillery pieces and mortars, and 16,000 trucks.

The withdrawal was planned and run with full security measures, as more than 150,000 Mujahedin controlled 80 percent of the territory. Security was particularly crucial on the Salang highway, which was under threat from Ahmad Shah Massoud's Mujahedin. The Soviet command struck a deal with Massoud for the safe passage of its troops. The deal, however, was later broken by the Soviets due to Najibullah's insistence on attacking and weakening the Mujahedin before the Soviet troops left the country.[115] Gromov later admitted that during the preparation for withdrawal, he did not follow orders from Moscow Headquarters to fire on field commanders. The Soviet command had an unpublicized agreement of neutrality with these commanders during the withdrawal. Gromov ordered his troops to fire upon unoccupied ravines, so as to avoid any serious bloodshed. According to Russian General Staff accounts, in order to ensure the organized and safe march of the retrograding forces, withdrawal routes were divided into 120- to 150-kilometer stretches, which was a day's motor march. At the end of every stretch, the march column would concentrate into a prepared bivouac site, which was prepared for defense with dug-in positions for tanks and BMPs. The site was protected by minefields. The stationary guards lined the route while army aviation supported the marching unit. For example, 74 sorties were launched by the air force on August 5 in the Kandahar region. They made 37 bombing and strafing attacks. Meanwhile, the engineer detachments were removing mines.[116]

Conclusion

The Soviet invasion and its nine-year occupation of Afghanistan cost both sides enormously. From December 25,

1979, when the Soviet forces launched the invasion of Afghanistan to February 15, 1989, when the last soldier of the 40th Army left the country, a total of 620,000 soldiers (525,000 army, 90,000 border troops and other KGB units, and 5,000 troops of the Ministry of Interior—"MVD"—and police) served with the forces in Afghanistan, although only 80,000 to 114,000 were present in the country at one time. Additionally, some 21,000 clerical and labor details served with the Soviet troops during the same period. The Soviet casualties numbered 14,453 dead (13,833 army, 572 KGB, and 28 MVD); 312 servicemen were listed as missing in action or taken prisoner, of which 119 were later freed and 97 returned to the Soviet Union, 22 went to other countries, and a number stayed in Afghanistan. From the deployed troops 53,753 were wounded and 415,932 fell sick.[117] Material losses were quite significant and included 103 fixed-wing aircraft, 317 helicopters, 147 tanks, 1,314 infantry fighting vehicles (BMP) and armored personnel carriers, 433 artillery pieces and mortars, 11,309 motor vehicles, 11,369 pieces of engineer equipment, and 1,138 radio communication and command and staff vehicles.[118]

Afghanistan lost heavily. Between 1.2 and 1.5 million of the civilian population, mostly from the rural areas, perished in bombings, strafings, and ground operations. Over five million became refugees in neighboring countries and about two million others were internally displaced. The war destroyed the country's irrigation system and communication infrastructure and criminalized the economy through the explosion of poppy cultivation and drug production as part of the war economy. The war resulted in the destruction of government institutions in Afghanistan and the loss of national harmony and political stability, plunging the country into unrelenting civil war following the exit of the Soviet military forces. No war in the past had ever caused so much social change in Afghanistan—it ripped society apart vertically and horizontally.

Many Afghans firmly believe that the Soviet military failure in Afghanistan led to the breakup of the Soviet Union less than three years after its withdrawal from Afghanistan. Although there were many other internal and external factors that contributed to the fall of the Soviet Empire and its Communist system in the closing decade of the twentieth century, the Afghan war caused domestic disillusionment in Russia and dealt a heavy blow to the prestige of the Soviet Union as a superpower and contributed to its final demise.

The war left no party untouched. As a battleground for the two superpowers, Afghanistan sustained the devastation caused by the military actions of the invading side as well as by the support of the superpower that responded to the invasion. When the superpower contest was over, the belligerents walked away from the Great Game wreckage, opening the way for the competing neighbors to finish the destruction in a “Lesser Game.” The Afghans were the big losers. They suffered enormously during the war and failed to win the peace. Moscow’s defeat in a regional war was followed by its global retreat, culminating in its eventual breakup. On the other hand the cost of Washington’s victory in the Afghan power game was the advancement of the mentality of *Jihad*, which motivated a worldwide terrorist network centered in the war-devastated Afghanistan. In the words of Barnet Rubin, “To the extent that terrorists have found refuge and training in Afghanistan, the blame must go to all those who destroyed that country’s fragile institutions, starting with the Soviet Union.”[119]

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11 The Civil War and the Rise of the Taliban

1989–2001

The Soviet withdrawal and the end of its military occupation of Afghanistan did not end the war. The war merely entered into a different stage, as the Kremlin continued to supply and support the Moscow-backed government in Kabul while the Mujahedin's Western backers kept open the pipeline of weapons and money flowing to the resistance forces. This symmetry fueled the armed struggle, which continued with little prospect for peace. The Mujahedin and their foreign supporters firmly believed that they could outwait the collapse of the Najibullah government once the Soviet army left. On the other hand, pinning hope on continued backing from the Soviet Union and exploiting the deepening division between the Mujahedin parties, Kabul felt it could tough out the complicated conditions and win more and more Afghans to its side by introducing reforms, openness, and a certain level of civil liberties. The Najibullah government also launched a consistent propaganda campaign to discredit the Mujahedin for having no unified vision and for threatening to plunge the country into further violence with their factional struggle for power.

Both sides were heavily armed as a result of the long years of war with the superpowers' involvement. The ensuing militarization of politics in Afghanistan left little chance for peace once the Soviet military pulled out. The troops of the Moscow-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) and its successor, the Republic of Afghanistan (ROA), more than tripled in less than 10 years to a level of 329,000.[1] Increases in military hardware, particularly after the Soviet pullout, were far greater. The size of the ground forces expanded from 10 divisions to 22.[2] In an effort to "popularize" the defense of the revolution and improve the force-to-space ratio, the regime recruited a large number of tribal and local militias, including those that expanded into the multibrigade 53rd Division of Uzbek commanded by general Rashid Dostum.[3] In addition, the government created 14 Border Guard brigades[4] and the elite National Guard Corps.[5] The army had 12 R-300 (Scud) and 10 Luna-M (Frog) surface-to-surface missile launchers, 1,568 battle tanks, 828 infantry fighting vehicles, 1,388 armored personnel carriers, 116 rocket systems, 4,880 artillery guns, and 2,151mortars. The Afghan air force at its peak in 1989 had at least 240 fixed-wing combat aircraft (Mig-21, Su-7, Su-20, Su-22, and Il-39), including 60 transport aircraft (An-12, An-26, An-32, and Yak-40) and 150 helicopters. In 1990, military material valued at 2.2 billion rubles—including two Luna SSM systems, 380 tanks, 211 BMPs, 651 APCs, 50 rocket artillery systems, 114 guns and mortars, 820 grenade launchers, 1,000 flamethrowers, 95,400 small arms, 680 air defense guns and systems, 66 aircraft, 37 helicopters, 1,938,000 artillery and mortar ammunition, and 8,200 air bombs—was supplied by the Soviet Union through an air-bridge supply operation.[6]

On the other hand, the Mujahedin remained irregular forces armed; they were equipped with light weapons and portable equipment for mobile guerrilla attacks, and they

lacked heavy weapons and means, including air power, for conventional warfare. Russian estimates put the number of Mujahedin's active fighters in 1991 at nearly 200,000 with 97 tanks, 60 BMPs, 100 APCs, over 5,000 antiaircraft heavy machine guns, 2,000 recoilless rifles, over 11,000 antitank weapons (RPGs), and 3,500 mortars.[7] The tactical strength of the Mujahedin was its mobility and freedom of action against the fixed targets of the enemy garrisons. But once the Mujahedin attempted to launch conventional frontal attacks on strong enemy targets, they lost their inherent advantage of agility and were outgunned by the enemy forces. The withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan was seen as a great victory and military achievement by the Mujahedin factions. In the euphoria of such success, they overestimated their conventional military capacity and fell into the trap of overconfidence that cost them dearly.

The period between the Soviet military pullout and the fall of the Moscow-backed government in Kabul (February 1989–April 1992) was marked by unsuccessful Mujahedin efforts to form an all-inclusive government to replace the Communist regime in Kabul, which was expected to fall following the complete withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan. UN efforts to mediate the formation of a broad-based government in Afghanistan, which would include some elements of the Moscow-backed Najibullah regime, met strong resistance by the Mujahedin parties and their foreign backers. Islamabad saw a military victory by pro-Pakistani Mujahedin parties within their grasp once the Soviet forces pulled out. Iran on the other side was trying to secure a fair share for the Iran-based Afghan groups in any settlement.[8]

As the factional competition with ethnic underpinnings intensified, Iran encouraged the unification of fragmented Afghan Shi'a parties to enhance their political weight in post-Communist Afghan politics. In stark contrast to its

doctrinaire approach in the earlier years of the revolution, Iran took a pragmatic stance, encouraging the alliance of all Afghan Shi'a factions regardless of their political orientations. The move led to the formation of a nine-party alliance. Known as the Coalition Council of the Afghan Islamic Revolution, the group represented the Shi'a population of Afghanistan in the Islamabad assembly (*Shura*) convened in January 1989 to form what was dubbed as the Afghan Interim Government (AIG). However, differences over the level of Shi'a participation in the government led to the Iran-based coalition's boycott of the *Shura*.

About six months later (July 1989), Iran-based parties were fully integrated into the unified Islamic Unity Party (Hezb-e Wahdat-e Islami), led by Abdul Ali Mazari. The new party included all elements of the nine-party coalition except Ayatollah Mohseni's Islamic Movement (Harakat-e Islami), which remained independent and allied with Sunni factions.[9] Two years later in July 1991, the Iranian foreign minister, Ali Akbar Velayati, and the Pakistani secretary of foreign affairs, Akram Zaki, mediated renewed talks in Islamabad between Iranian-based Mujahedin and their Pakistan-based counterparts to reach a settlement on an interim power-sharing mechanism that would rule Afghanistan before elections. The negotiations failed again.

The Battle of Jalalabad

In March 1989, a few weeks after the completion of the Soviet withdrawal, the Mujahedin (Afghan) Interim Government (AIG), which was formed in Peshawar in December 1988, was tempted to launch a frontal attack on Jalalabad, conducting a conventional war with unconventional means. The idea was supported by Pakistan intelligence (the ISI) under General Hamid Gul with the

approval of Pakistan's prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, and with encouragement from the CIA. Hamid Gul insisted that Jalalabad would fall in one week and was strongly against making terms with the "Communist" regime of Najibullah.[10] Encouraged by the fall of isolated government posts in the Kunar Province, including Barikot, Asmar, and Asadabad, the AIG was eager to capture Jalalabad and move the center of the interim government inside Afghanistan. Jalalabad, located about 30 miles from the Pakistani border, made an attractive objective. Neither the AIG nor the ISI and other foreign Mujahedin partners had closely assessed the situation and the correlation of forces when planning the attack.

In early March, after assembling 5,000 to 7,000 Mujahedin from different factions in the hills around Jalalabad, the offensive was launched along the corridor straddling the Torkham-Jalalabad highway (Highway 1). The operation violated every tested principle of warfare and any conventional wisdom. It was a frontal attack pitting light weapons against a strongly held objective defended by medium- and long-range artillery, surface-to-surface missiles (including Scud and Luna [Frog]), bomber aircraft, and close air support. Further, the operation was led by eight Mujahedin commanders with no overall command and therefore without dependable command and coordination of the combat action. The Mujahedin failed to achieve surprise, as the preparation was heralded beforehand. The operation was not a united Mujahedin endeavor. Some major field commanders were against the action, seeing it as unwise to hit their heads against a solid wall, expecting failure and heavy losses. Among them, Commander Abdul Haq told author Robert Kaplan that it was stupid to attack Jalalabad, "because it's dumb to lose ten thousand lives," he said. "There's no way the mujahidin can take the city now. It's surrounded by a river, mountains, and minefields. And if we

do take it, what's going to happen? The Russians will bomb the shit out of us, that's what. . . . No, we must take no cities. . . . Jalalabad should fall last, not first."[11]

On the other hand, the Republic of Afghanistan garrison in Jalalabad, including the 11th Infantry Division reinforced by other elements shifted from Kabul, had established a strong defensive line stretching about 11 miles to the east and south. Kabul had a clear strategy of strongly holding the major cities and key areas and vacating outlying and hard-to-defend posts in the interest of the principle of "economy of force." The government forces had fortified their defensive positions and laid minefields and other obstacles on the main approaches. And finally, the regime troops were fighting for survival after some prisoners were summarily executed by the Mujahedin fighters and their allied Arab militants.

The Mujahedin offensive was launched on March 5 as separate groups under their field commanders advanced along the major highway and secondary routes to the southeast. The operation achieved an initial momentum as the Mujahedin groups competed for seizing advantageous positions around Jalalabad. Samar Khel, the former base of the 66th Soviet Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade, located seven miles to the east of Jalalabad, was overrun and completely looted by the Mujahedin fighters who were hard to control. Some looters left the battlefield to take their booty to Pakistan. In the meantime, another group captured the Jalalabad airfield some two miles southwest of the city. The government counterattacked and recaptured the airstrip, which remained under government control to the end of the battle. With the loss of air landing facilities, however, the supply and reinforcement of Jalalabad from Kabul were limited to road traffic that was key to the defense of the city. The ISI and CIA call for several Mujahedin commanders from the Sorobi area to block the

highway had mixed results due to the absence of a unified command of the operation. Different Mujahedin groups were pursuing their self-interests in the campaign. The highway traffic was hindered but never blocked from supplying and reinforcing Jalalabad.[12]

Thus the situation failed to develop according to the Mujahedin's expectations. Jalalabad did not fall in a "week"; the offensive stalled for months. By mid-May, no headway had been made toward capturing Jalalabad, and in July, the government forces recaptured Samar Khel. During the stalemate, which lasted through June, while the Mujahedin were pinned down in static positions, they became sitting targets for the government fire strikes by artillery, air bombardment, and long-range Scud rocket attacks by three Scud batteries in Kabul. Over 400 Scud missiles were fired on the besiegers, with four reportedly landing in Pakistan's territory.[13] Suffering heavy losses, the Mujahedin offensive ran out of steam shortly after it started and turned into a static siege where individual commanders conducted combat actions on their own without being part of an overall plan and without coordination. Mujahedin casualties during the four-month siege numbered more than 3,000 killed and wounded, or nearly 40 percent of their initial attacking force. The civilian casualties were estimated at 12,000 to 15,000, causing an exodus of some 20,000 refugees running away from the battle. With the gradual withdrawal of the Mujahedin forces, the Kabul government forces broke the siege, launched a counterattack, and regained the territory lost to the Mujahedin's initial drive.

The Jalalabad offensive became a major Mujahedin setback with a lasting impact. It boosted the morale of the regime forces and impressed the international stakeholders, who saw that the Mujahedin were not yet ready to defeat the Kabul government in a military encounter. The Pakistani government made the ISI chief a scapegoat for the blunder

and removed Lieutenant General Hamid Gul from the top position of the spy agency, replacing him with Lieutenant General Shams-ur-Rahman Kallu. Pakistan, however, did not give up the idea of overthrowing the Najibullah government militarily. Pakistan supported the Hezb-i-Islami faction, led by Gulboddin Hekmatyar, whose forces, during the closing stages of the Jalalabad siege, ambushed and killed 36 of Ahmad Shah Massoud's men, including seven important commanders. The attack was in Takhar Province. Massoud struck back, hunted down the culprits, and executed them after trial. The killings intensified the hostility between the two main Mujahedin factions, which favored the position of the Kabul government.

But Kabul's weakness was not in its military strength; it was caused by the division within the regime due to the perennial power struggle between the two wings of the PDPA—the Khalq and the Parcham. The Khalqis, led by the defense minister Shahnawaz Tanai, felt they were marginalized by Najibullah and his Parchami clique. This coincided with the de-ideologization of the state, leading to the quasi-disappearance of strict ideological polarization in the country after the departure of the Soviet troops in 1989. Later on, as the Communist government in Kabul showed signs of cracks in its viability, traditional tribal and ethnic connections were used by the competing Mujahedin groups in a new form to seize control of the government. On the one side, rival factions of the Mujahedin tried to work with any element useful to their power-seeking goals, and on the other side, elements of the failing Najibullah regime were desperately trying to make the best out of a confusing situation by cutting deals with separate Mujahedin factions. Under these conditions, ethnic and regional elements on both sides of the waning ideological line forged coalitions in a new struggle for power. In early March 1990, a Pashtun-led alliance involving the ROA minister of defense Shahnawaz

Tanai and Gulboddin Hekmatyar, the leader of a fundamentalist Mujahedin faction, Hezb-e Islami, staged an unsuccessful coup to overthrow the Najibullah government. The deep division of the armed forces turned the coup attempt into infighting between the military adherents of the rival branches of the party. The bloody coup on March 6, 1990, failed with significant losses on both sides and destroyed nearly 50 military aircraft on several airfields. Tanai fled to Pakistan and joined Gulboddin Hekmatyar and his ISI patrons. This strange alliance continued to subsist with the support of the ISI, which later planned on using the partnership to overthrow the Kabul government by military means led by Hekmatyar. The coup further deepened the rift within the party ranks, especially as it was followed by wide purges of the Khalqis in the army and the party.

Although a month later the Afghan government forces, spearheaded by the Uzbek militia of General Rashid Dostum, launched a successful offensive against the Mujahedin stronghold of Paghman, west of the capital, and although by the end of June they had cleared the area following heavy fighting and air bombardment, the strategic situation was changing rapidly due to the support of a political solution to the civil war from the Great Powers.

By the summer of 1990, the thaw between Washington and Moscow led to a better understanding between them over regional issues, including Afghanistan. In his summit with President H. W. George Bush in June 1990 at Camp David, the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev showed flexibility in bringing the proxy war in Afghanistan to a peaceful end. He later wrote that it was the first time the two leaders discussed the Afghanistan problem in a nonconfrontational tone. “George Bush declared,” he wrote,

> that the United States did not intend to play the Afghan card and was not interested in [the] establishment of a radical regime in Afghanistan which would be hostile to the Soviet Union. He outlined his views about a possible long-term settlement, which incidentally coincided with our own ideas on a

> number of points. It boiled down to the following: the organization of free elections under the control of the United Nations and constitution of a broad-based coalition government which would run affairs until the election. Bush assured me that following the start of such transitional period, the United States would be prepared to stop supplying weapons to the Mujahedin and to start withdrawing military equipment and arms on [the] condition that the Soviet Union and the other countries involved would do the same.[14]

It took another year or so for the Great Powers to agree on "negative symmetry," stopping the supply of weapons to both sides in support of a political solution to the Afghan civil war. Then the quest for a political settlement gained momentum, and the United Nations continued its mediation to bring peace to Afghanistan. In spite of its lip service to the political solution, the ISI spared no effort to build up the forces of Hekmatyar and his allies for a planned attack on Gardez, Jalalabad, and Kabul, assisted by the former ISI director General Hamid Gul and the known Afghan hands at the ISI, including Brigadier Janjua and Colonel Sultan Amir Tarar, known as Colonel Imam. The ISI diverted a large portion of military equipment, including tanks and other armored vehicles captured in Iraq during Operation Desert Storm (which lasted from January 17, 1991, to February 28, 1991), to the Hekmatyar faction. The United States had supplied these to support all the Afghan Mujahedin. This move raised protests from the moderate Mujahedin groups that contributed a symbolic contingent of Mujahedin fighters to the fight with the US-led coalition in the Gulf War.[15]

The Washington-Moscow negative symmetry agreement on September 13, 1991, came on the heels of the US policy of drifting toward disengagement from Afghanistan and only focusing on issues that could not be effectively addressed until peace returned to Afghanistan. These issues included retrieving the Stinger missiles in the hands of Afghans, promoting regional stability, the return of refugees, and combating narcotics. According to Peter Tomsen, the US envoy to the Mujahedin, due to the Bush-Gorbachev

interaction on important global affairs (1989–1991), Afghanistan dropped down to a second-tier priority for the Bush administration (1989–1993), and then to the third tier after the negative symmetry agreement in September 1991. After the agreement went into effect on January 1992, Afghanistan was largely forgotten by high-level policy makers in Washington.[16] The US shipment of arms to Mujahedin stopped on New Year's Day 1992, and simultaneously the Soviet assistance to Najibullah trickled and then stopped after the breakup of the Soviet Union in December 1991. Pakistan, however, continued to supply Hekmatyar's and Sayaf's forces. As Barnet Rubin writes,

> In the fall of 1989 . . . the United States engaged in a two track policy, beginning a diplomatic dialogue with [the] USSR on a UN-sponsored political settlement, while trying to improve the military performance of the mujahidin. In an attempt to keep the two tracks from contradicting each other, the United States also decided that no weapons paid for by its funds would be given to Hikmatyar or Sayyaf [*sic*], who opposed such settlement. . . . Saudi and other Arab funds, however, took up the slack in aid to mujahidin "extremists," so this policy made little if any difference on the ground.[17]

Kabul soon felt serious food shortages, causing the desertion of the regime adherents as they saw that the ship of state was sinking. The situation favored the Afghan Islamist factions of Hekmatyar and Sayaf, who continued to receive material support from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, putting them in an advantageous position vis-à-vis the moderate Mujahedin commanders on the battlefronts inside Afghanistan, including Ahmad Shah Massoud and Abdul Haq. The unintended consequences of the US abandonment led to the rise of radicals in Afghanistan and the establishment of the al-Qaeda network in the country, facilitating the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States. Some Afghans sounded the warning long before the tragedy happened.

However, when the Cold War was over, the Afghan conflict, in the words of a UN official, became a “forgotten war” and the Afghans became “a forgotten people.”[18] The US diplomacy in support of the UN efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Afghan civil war without foreign intervention lacked consistency and perseverance.

While Pakistan and Saudi Arabia were planning to support the Pashtun alliance of Hekmatyar and Tanai to make another attempt to take Kabul, they were beaten to the draw by a non-Pashtun coalition of northerners made up of disillusioned forces of the falling Kabul regime and the Mujahedin. There were speculations that Najibullah might transfer power to a Pashtun leader in the resistance. In fact, Najibullah did send emissaries to the former Afghan king Mohammad Zahir Shah to request that he return from his exile in Rome to head a coalition government in Afghanistan. Zahir Shah turned down the offer.[19] The reaction to such a scenario was strong among the Afghan Mujahedin in Iran, who suggested that Iran might intervene to foil the concept.[20] With the halt in Russian supplies to Kabul, which amounted to 230,000 tons of food per year, there was a real threat to the survival of the regime.

Exactly two years after the failed Hekmatyar-Tanai coup, a coalition of non-Pashtun elements successfully challenged and brought down the Najibullah regime. The alliance grouped the Mujahedin forces under the Tajik commander Ahmad Shah Massoud and the Iran-backed Hazara Hezb-e Wahdat under Abdul Ali Mazari with well-armed units of the Communist regime’s Uzbek militia, including the 53rd Division of General Rashid Dostum and a number of Ismaili and Tajik militias affiliated with the Kabul regime. The coalition action thwarted a UN arrangement for the peaceful transfer of power from the Najibullah regime to a transitional administration that was endorsed by the majority of Mujahedin parties. Meanwhile, losing control due

to the internal division, Najibullah was convinced to step down and transfer power to a neutral transitional government, which would have been brokered by the United Nations, and then retire to India. The situation changed rapidly after Najibullah announced, on March 18, 1992, his willingness to resign in order to make way for a neutral interim government. But as the beleaguered president was trying to fly to India under UN arrangements, he was stopped on the way to the airport by his leftist rivals and was forced to take refuge at the UN headquarters in Kabul, where he stayed for more than four years until the fall of Kabul to the Taliban in 1996, when he met his brutal death at the hand of the victors.

The Northern Alliance seized control of major cities in the north and, by mid-April, had captured Charikar and the Bagram airbase. Hekmatyar rushed to beat these rival forces in capturing Kabul, but the capital had mostly fallen to the joint forces of Massoud and Dostum. Dostum had transported his division by air from the north to the capital. Although some Khalqi members of the defunct government helped Hekmatyar's men make some initial inroads into Kabul, they were soon driven out by the overwhelming numbers of the northern partners. Hekmatyar moved into the suburbs, from where he began pounding the capital with rockets, causing heavy civilian casualties. The struggle for the control of Kabul between rival forces frustrated a UN plan for the peaceful transfer of power from the Communist regime to a transitional government that the United Nations had worked out in consultation with the Mujahedin factions. This led to an intense power struggle between the Mujahedin groups, who had taken over different parts of the country and seized or looted weapons and heavy equipment from the deserted or surrendered military bases.[21] Except for the formations linked to the antiregime collaborators, no

military unit maintained its organizational integrity.[22] The state and the army had both collapsed.

The period immediately following the collapse of the Communist regime in Afghanistan was dominated by an intense struggle for power by ethnically led factions with extensive foreign involvement. Mujahedin factions hastily put together a power-sharing arrangement on April 24 to fill the vacuum in Kabul after the collapse of the government. The agreement, known as the Peshawar Accord, called for a power transfer from the current rulers of Kabul to a 51-member Mujahedin caretaker administrative body headed by Sebghatullah Mujaddedi, which would serve for two months. This administration would be followed by a four-month interim administration led by Burhanuddin Rabbani, who would then hand over power to a transitional administration selected for 18 months by an assembly of elders and influential figures (*Shura-ye Ahl-e Hal-o-'aqd*). A few days later Mujaddedi arrived in Kabul with his group and on April 28, 1992, presided over the transfer of power from the remnants of the Kabul regime. The fighting between the forces of Massoud and Hekmatyar continued with thousands of civilian casualties and the displacement of thousands more. The country was plunged into an unrelenting civil war that endured throughout Mujaddedi's and Rabbani's administration. The central government failed to establish its authority over the country and competing Mujahedin factions raced to seize control of the provinces and carved up the devastated country into an odd assortment of fiefdoms. The situation had an unsettling impact on national and international peace efforts. The collapse of the state and the emergence of a new elite, who invoked infrapolitical references to legitimize their claims on power, spawned new power bases, de facto ministates, political freebooters, and warlords. Factional miniarmies were reluctant to desist from waging a low-cost war of attrition in support of their

factional interests. Since such a war was more destructive to the civilian population than to the combatants, the warring factions had little incentive to opt for a peace that did not favor their corporate agenda.[23]

Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan brokered a new agreement in Islamabad on March 7, 1993. This recognized Rabbani as president and Hekmatyar as the prime minister for a new term until June 1994 and awarded the Shi'a Hezb-e Wahdat and Harakat-e Islami parties senior positions in the government. They immediately followed this with a pilgrimage of the party leaders to Mecca, where they vowed to stay committed to the pact. The power-sharing arrangement failed to unite competing parties into a national government. The deal merely apportioned the cabinet posts among power contenders without dissolving the factional militias. As soon as the leaders returned from the Mecca pilgrimage, they went back on their pledges and the hostilities were renewed, despite a follow-up settlement in Jalalabad on May 28, 1993, which basically reaffirmed the previous pact. Subsequently, Hekmatyar refused to move to Kabul from his stronghold in Chaharasia to assume his office as prime minister and occasionally bombarded the capital randomly with rockets. The government remained fragmented, contentious, and ineffective.

As the political squabbling continued, factional violence split the capital into several spheres of influence, controlled by the warlords, who were often locked into violent turf battles, causing civilian casualties and a prevailing state of terror. In the western precincts of Kabul, the Shi'a Wahdat Party, headed by Abdul Ali Mazari, and the Sunni fundamentalist Islamic Unity Party of Abdur Rab Rasoul Sayaf were locked in a fierce power struggle, which was intensified by ethnic and sectarian undertones. One of the bloodiest internecine killings took place on February 11, 1993, in the western suburbs of the capital. The forces of

Shura-i-Nazar of Ahmad Shah Massoud and Rabbani, in conjunction with Sayaf's Wahhabi-oriented Sunni adherents, attacked the Shi'a Wahdat Party stronghold in the sprawling residential area of Afshar, west of Kabul. The attack turned into a brutal massacre of the Afshar population and the Wahdat fighters. Massoud's and Sayaf's unbridled storm into the densely populated area developed into a massacre when the attackers rampaged through Afshar, murdering, raping, plundering, and burning homes as revenge for the Wahdat's systematic abduction and brutalizing of civilians of other sects and ethnicities. Although the offensive was called off the following day, the damage was done.

The failure of Mujahedin groups under foreign (mostly Pakistani) influence to rise above factional interests blocked the reunification of the country and the restoration of peace. The Tajik-led Kabul administration (1992–1996), under Burhanuddin Rabbani and his military chief, Ahmad Shah Massoud, did not succeed in its attempts to broaden its base. Nor did it, in more than nominal terms, organize a united army that could support the reunification of the state. Opposition leaders, along with those former Mujahedin nominally supporting the government, were reluctant to disarm their followers and join a weak government that was politically and militarily controlled by the Rabbani-Massoud group. This polarization deepened when, in January 1994, an anti-Kabul front was formed by Hekmatyar, Dostum, and Wahdat and Mujaddedi factions and launched a surprise offensive operation against Rabbani and Massoud in Kabul. Although the initial attack was repelled, the opposition front, known as Shura-i-Hamhangi (the Coordination Council), continued to challenge the authority of the Rabbani-Massoud government.

The situation fostered an intense competition to enlarge factional militias by indiscriminate recruitment from their respective ethnic constituencies or, in the case of some

parties, increased reliance on non-Afghans, including Arab militants. The process not only ethnicitized the warring militias but also brought large numbers of bandits, thugs, and criminal elements into the ranks of the competing factions. This had also been a result of the expansion of DRA and ROA forces in the 1980s. Factional—and nominally national—leaders were reluctant to prevent their allies from committing criminal acts, fearing their defection to a rival party. This gave a free hand to armed groups that were involved in narcotics, plundering public and private property, extortion, corruption, and violence.[24] The collapse of the state ushered in a renewed "brain drain" of Afghans who had been on both sides of the *Jihad* of the 1980s.

The civil war in Afghanistan was a microcosm of the post–Cold War multilateral competition for influence in unsettled regions. The Afghan conflict involved internal armed factions with extensive foreign links, neighboring states that pursued competing strategic interests, and ultraregional players who had ideological, security, or economic stakes in the chaos. Armed struggle was not an instrument of a clearly defined policy but a means for open-ended gains in a volatile environment. The trend defied classic norms of warfare and widely accepted military concepts. Instead of war being a "continuation of politics by other means," militarized politics was an extension of war through other channels. The conceptual paradox did not end there. Militia formations tailored for guerrilla warfare fought conventional battles. Traditional practices regulated the use of new weapons instead of modern technology reshaping outdated procedures. The "new" followed the "old," the past governed the present.

The Regional Actors

Maintaining a strong influence in Afghanistan had long been the hallmark of Pakistan's Afghan policy. Islamabad's quest for a westward strategic depth to counter India's geopolitical edge had been one of the underlying principles of its strategy in the 1990s. Pakistan spared no effort to shape Afghan developments in accordance with its political ambitions. It helped keep the Afghan Mujahedin groups divided so they could be easily controlled—a move that fueled an intra-Mujahedin power struggle and civil strife following the collapse of the Communist regime in 1992.[25]

Pakistan excessively favored those Islamist parties that had close relationships with Pakistani intelligence. Pakistan policy tried to sideline Afghan nationalist forces that held independent views. On the other hand, Iran was seeking a secure and stable backyard to its east and therefore its Afghan policy was limited in scope. Tehran did not want a hostile government in Afghanistan. However, Tehran failed to pursue a clear and well-defined strategy. Its policy to promote Iranian culture in Afghanistan was confrontational and lacked focus, while its commitment to support the Shi'a minority was too narrow and biased to influence non-Shi'a parties.

So long as their interests did not clash, Iran and Pakistan genuinely worked together to find a peaceful solution to the Afghan civil war. However, Iran had no illusions about the depth of Pakistan's connections with the Afghan political forces and its influence on Afghan developments. Nevertheless, despite its limitations, Iran could not afford to be absent from the Afghan political scene, though it would not play the leading role.

The Rise of the Taliban

In 1994, an alleged vigilante network of former Mujahedin subcommanders who had returned to religious studies after

the war picked up arms to cleanse the crime-infested streets and districts of Kandahar, which were ruled by local warlords, corrupt officials, and illegal armed groups. Winning unqualified support from victimized citizens, within a few months, the self-appointed lawmen grew into an anticorruption puritanical Islamic movement known as the Taliban. Since most of the founders of this movement were identified as students of religious education, or *Talibs*, their movement was named the Taliban (religion students).

The genesis of the movement is wrapped in a mixture of myths and realities. Some accounts refer to the emergence of the movement as a homegrown desperate response to the spread of unbridled criminality and corruption in Kandahar, where numerous armed groups roamed the streets, harassing and robbing the citizens and fighting turf battles, sometimes with tanks and other heavy weapons, in densely populated areas. The growing criminality and immoral behavior of competing armed group commanders and warlords created a state of terror in the city. Others consider that the movement was a deliberate design planned and carried out by Pakistan's ISI using the former young Afghan Mujahedin commanders, local Pashtun mullahs, fundamentalist religious parties and their madrassa students, General Tanai's network of former Communist regime's military officers, and Arab militants. The reality is somewhere in between. What is obvious is that the breakdown of law and order in Kandahar and infighting among rival warlords had pushed the citizens to the point that they were willing to back any movement that could bring a sense of security and order to the community. The emergence of the Taliban is seen in this context. It is also clear that Pakistani intelligence, having failed to get their desired return on their investment in Hekmatyar (who suffered repeated defeats), was looking for an alternative surrogate, which they soon found in the Taliban. From its

birth, the Taliban movement was adopted by Pakistani intelligence and was well supplied with arms and fighting men from Pakistani madrassas.

In the spring of 1994, the Taliban chose a noncontroversial mullah from a modest mosque in Sangisar, 20 miles outside Kandahar, named Mullah Mohammad Omar as their leader. Omar, who was a former local Mujahedin subcommander and a crack RPG-7 gunner, had returned to religious studies and was teaching at a local madrassa near his mosque. His brothers-in-arms were mostly of the same background. What is common to all stories is that initially small groups of *Talibs* and concerned merchants managed to build a wider network of devoted Muslim activists around Kandahar and decided to rise up against the criminal and un-Islamic practices in the area.[26]

The Taliban decided to clear the main roads of the warlords' illegal tollgates. They had set up dozens of checkpoints along different stretches of major highways to tax and rob the passengers and convoys. Men of one commander would even take female and young boy travelers to their bases (*utaks*) for sexual exploitation. Once the nascent Taliban groups moved against the violators and punished them severely, a large number of concerned citizens and merchants and some former Mujahedin stood behind them. The group declared its intention to crack down on criminals, cleaning the streets and highways and introducing law and order based on Islamic Sharia. Taking the moral high ground and meting out fast and ready justice rulings, they established their influence around Kandahar, as the corrupt commanders either were punished or fled the area. Meanwhile, the Taliban sent their emissaries to Ismail Khan in Herat and Burhanuddin Rabbani in Kabul to win their support. However, before the Taliban could come to national power, they needed far greater support and patronage than what was locally available. The movement

had maintained extensive ties with Pakistani madrassas that had been established during the *Jihad* years. Once the Taliban turned to their religious soul mate, Mawlana Fazl Rahman and his Jamiat-i-Ulema-e Islam (JUI) party of Deobandi orientation, for support, their relationship with Pakistan expanded rapidly. The mawlana was a political ally of Pakistan's new government under Benazir Bhutto and had access to Pakistani government officials, the army, and the ISI. The link grew stronger over the coming year.

In October 1994, responding to requests from local truckers and merchants to clean the border crossing at Spin Boldak from the domination of the Hekmatyar commanders, who exacted hefty illegal taxes on them, the Taliban moved on the border town. On October 12, 1994, 200 Taliban from Kandahar and a number of others from Pakistani madrassas attacked and drove out the corrupt commanders from Spin Boldak and, with assistance from the ISI, seized the Hezb-i-Islami arms dump, which included 18,000 AK-47 rifles and other weapons and ammunition.[27] Peter Tomsen sees the Spin Boldak event as a preplanned operation by the ISI to empower the Taliban as its new surrogate in Afghanistan.[28] The incident, he states, paved the way for the implementation of the Bhutto government's pet project to open a land trade route to Central Asia through Kandahar and Herat up to Turkmenistan.

Less than one month later, on November 3, 1994, the Taliban helped the passage of the first Pakistani convoy of 25 trucks carrying humanitarian material to Herat and Turkmenistan, which was held up by non-Taliban Kandahar commanders. The Taliban not only freed the convoy but also drove out the corrupt commanders and established full control over the second largest city of Afghanistan.[29] Peter Tomsen asserts that the convoy was actually 36 trucks and was a cover for an offensive to help the Taliban seize control of Kandahar.[30] The Taliban accounts claim that the attack on

Spin Boldak was carried out by the Taliban from Kandahar, along with several Taliban fronts in the area, and with assistance from the leading Mujahedin commander in Kandahar, Mullah Naqib. The mullah was assigned by the Kabul government as the corps commander of Kandahar and was in collaboration with the Taliban. The new rulers appointed Mullah Obaidullah commander of the Kandahar Corps; Mullah Mohammad Hasan was appointed governor; Akhtar Mohammad Mansur was given the command of the air force. “The old habits of keeping boys, adultery, looting, illegal checkpoints and the government of the gun were over.”[31]

Whatever the course of the event, the Pakistani government and the JUI celebrated the success of the Taliban and extended full-fledged support to them. Taking credit for the Taliban victory, General Babar, Pakistan’s interior minister, was privately telling journalists that the Taliban were “our boys,” while the Taliban were trying hard to present themselves as an independent movement and as not being “puppets.” All this notwithstanding, thousands of young Pashtun madrassa students in Baluchistan and the North West Frontier Province (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) swarmed into the Taliban ranks, and by December 1994 some 12,000 Afghan and Pakistani students joined the Taliban at their base in Kandahar.[32]

The Expansion of the Taliban

The birth of the Taliban movement in 1994 was a turning point in the Afghan civil war. Emerging as a popular reaction to prevailing chaos in a broken state, the puritanical Sunni militia found extensive support among the masses that had been victimized by continued infighting and lawlessness. As a predominantly Pashtun movement, the Taliban received extensive support from Pakistan and Pashtuns across the

country, who thought the movement might restore their national dominance, which had been bruised by the domination of the Tajik-led coalition government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani, who had unilaterally extended his mandate several times. This had caused discontent and a sense of diminution among the Pashtuns, who have been the traditional ruling group in Afghanistan since 1747. Even Pashtun intellectuals in the West, who seriously differed with the Taliban on many issues, expressed support for the movement on ethnic grounds. On the other hand, fears of the political and cultural hegemony of Pashtuns under the Taliban, particularly after the fall of Kabul to the student militia in September 1996, precipitated a political alliance of Tajik, Uzbek, and Shi'a factions in an anti-Taliban coalition.

The radical Islamic Taliban established control over 90 percent of the country in less than four years by breaking up three warring factions[33] and cornering the fourth.[34] With strong military and logistics backing from Pakistani intelligence and increasing financial and political support from Saudi Arabia and the Arab fighters, the puritanical Sunni militia initially found extensive support among the masses. Further, riding a wave of public discontent, thousands of young recruits from the refugee madrassas across the border in Pakistan swelled their ranks. Many ex-army officers and dissatisfied former Mujahedin commanders who resented the continued infighting among the Mujahedin groups also joined the emerging force.

In a northward movement from their birthplace of Kandahar, Taliban forces made a lightening advance, reaching the gates of Kabul by mid-February 1995. The move broke former prime minister Gulboddin Hekmat-yar's three-year military siege of Kabul and dislodged the Iranian-backed Wahdat faction from the southwest precincts of Kabul following the killing of its leader, Abdul Ali Mazari, by

the Taliban. In September 1995, their strategic momentum enabled the Taliban to launch a dashing offensive to the west, advancing about 600 kilometers in 10 days. The operation led to the fall of Herat, extending the militia's control up to the Iranian border. A year later, the Taliban overran four provinces in the east in less than a month. They took the city of Jalalabad on September 11, 1996, and seized control of Kabul two weeks later (September 27). In August 1998, following the paid defection of two opposition commanders and the defection of a Pashtun contingent in Faryab,[35] hundreds of pickup trucks spearheaded the Taliban offensive in the north, leading to their capture of Mazar-i-Sharif (August 8) and Taleqan (August 11). The Taliban's military victories had far-reaching political consequences. The development intensified ethnic polarization within Afghan factional politics and moved Iran and Pakistan further apart as their Afghan policies gradually took divergent turns.

The Taliban's enforcement of a rigid and premodern interpretation of Islam, which prevailed mostly in Pashtun rural areas, clashed with accepted norms in the cities and areas inhibited by Shi'a and other non-Pashtun communities. In the areas under their control, the Taliban enforced an Islamic social order, including a religious dress code for both men and women. Men had to grow beards and women had to be veiled and concealed from view. The Taliban barred women from working outside the home and closed girls' schools. They also banned listening to music and watching TV and videos and some other forms of entertainment. Supporters of the Taliban saw the restrictions as an acceptable price for the peaceful conditions and security established under the Taliban rule.

The rise of the Taliban coincided with the return of Osama bin Laden to Afghanistan and the beginning of the establishment of his terrorist training network in the country.

In the spring of 1996, Sudan, under international pressure, asked Osama bin Laden, the leader of the militant al-Qaeda network, to leave the country. Having received favorable responses from Afghan Mujahedin leaders Burhanuddin Rabbani and Mawlawi Yunus Khales, the radical Arab activist left for Afghanistan. He returned to Jalalabad aboard a chartered flight with his wives on May 18, 1996. He was joined initially by some 300 Arab veterans of the Afghan *Jihad*, known as Afghan-Arabs. In August 1996, bin Laden declared war against the United States over the presence of the US troops in Saudi Arabia, claiming that their presence was aimed at taking over the region and turning it into "an American colony." With his fatwa titled "Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places [Mecca and Madina]," the al-Qaeda leader embarked on a wide campaign to recruit, train, and deploy terrorists from bases he established in Afghanistan. With the fall of Kabul to the Taliban, bin Laden accepted Mullah Omar's invitation and moved to Kandahar. Increasing his influence by funding the Taliban war effort against its rival forces, arming the Taliban troops, and bribing the Afghan commanders, bin Laden established his camps in Kabul, Kandahar, Nangrahar, Paktia, and Khost and brought thousands of militant "volunteers" from across the world and trained them to carry out his terrorist designs. He virtually took over the Afghan government airline, Ariana, which he used to ferry Islamist militants, arms, cash, and drugs throughout the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan.

The Taliban factor impaired the spirit of cooperation between Pakistan and Iran in finding a solution to the Afghan crisis. Inspired by competing interests in the Afghan conflict, the two countries chose to back rival factions in the war. Pakistan hoped that the Taliban's military victory would lead to their influence in Afghanistan and the security of trade routes to Central Asia. These were both supportive of

Pakistan's long-term geopolitical aims. But Iran viewed the Taliban as an anti-Shi'a and anti-Iranian fundamentalist Sunni movement supported by hostile forces. The movement's close ties with Pakistani anti-Shi'a groups, its links with Saudi Wahhabis, and the alleged Washington backing of the militia in support of its anti-Iranian policy were the source of Iran's distrust and fear. The Taliban's sectarian and ethnic parochialism, their tendency to marginalize Iranian-backed non-Pashtun factions, and their ouster of the Rabbani government added to the distrust. Iran saw the victory of the Taliban as part of a plot by Sunnis and the United States to isolate Iran.[36] Iran improved the logistic infrastructure of anti-Taliban forces and set up five training camps near the Afghan border for thousands of pro-Rabbani troops.[37] After the fall of Kabul to the Taliban, Iran continued to send supplies to the Rabbani-led anti-Taliban alliance through Central Asia.[38]

The polarization of Afghan politics upset continued UN peace mediations aimed at ending the war and forming a broad-based government. The United Nations complained that the foreign backing of rival camps left little incentive for the warring factions to accommodate the peace process.[39] Separate diplomatic efforts by Tehran and Islamabad made little headway. Iran's shuttle diplomacy, led by the deputy foreign minister Alauddin Boroujardi, met a major setback in September 1996 when the Taliban army captured Kabul and ousted the government of Burhanuddin Rabbani. Boroujardi was trying to improve relations between Rabbani and the opposing factions and resolve differences between Kabul and Islamabad. The following month, a new anti-Taliban alliance, comprising former enemies, was formed in the north of the country that grouped all major Tajik, Uzbek, Shi'a, and Ismaili factions. The group included Ahmad Shah Masoud's Shura-ye Nazar, Dostum's Junbish-e Mili Islami, Karim Khalili's and Akbari's factions of Hezb-e Wahdat, and

the Ismaili militia. Known as the Northern Alliance, the coalition was headed by the ousted Rabbani, who continued to be internationally recognized as the president of Afghanistan. Despite facing a common enemy, the coalition failed to develop into a cohesive military power and end constant infrafactional disputes over areas of influence.

After the fall of Kabul, Islamabad focused on the Taliban's military and political dominance as the basis of its legitimacy while Iran emphasized the international unpopularity of the Taliban militia and its potential threat to stability in the region. The Taliban's poor human rights record, their condoning of drug production, and their sheltering of wanted terrorists cost them international recognition. Fearing the spread of Taliban-inspired Islamic extremism and political instability, the Central Asian neighbors of Afghanistan joined Iran in opposing the Taliban policies. The Taliban and their foreign supporters argued that Iran favored the continuation of instability in Afghanistan to deter international companies from building oil and gas pipelines that would transport Central Asia's energy resources to the Indian Ocean through Afghanistan and Pakistan.

On the other hand, Iran and Iranian-backed Afghan factions alleged that the US government, the American oil company UNOCAL, and Saudi Arabia's Delta oil firm supported the Taliban grip on power to facilitate the construction of an oil and gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to outside markets, avoiding Iran. Iran's concerns were reflected in an article published in the *Washington Post* by Iran's ambassador to the United Nations, Kamal Kharazi, who later became Iran's foreign minister. Kharazi accused the US administration of efforts to isolate and contain Iran at all costs. He further wrote that according to the strategic scheme of American policy makers, "if a semblance of security can be maintained in Afghanistan, then the

proposition to build a gas and oil pipeline from the Central Asian republics through Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Indian Ocean gains credibility. By marginalizing Iran in Afghanistan and by bypassing Iran as a route for an oil and gas pipeline, U.S. strategists assume they stand a better chance to contain Iran."[40] Disputing the validity of the assumption, Kharazi doubted that peace and security would be maintained in Afghanistan through the use of force in defiance of broad support from all Afghan groups. Iran also denied its opposition to an Afghan pipeline.

The Taliban's short-lived military inroads in the north, during the spring of 1997, spurred the further polarization of Afghan politics. However, the Taliban's disastrous failure to sustain their brief hold on the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, the seat of power of the Northern Alliance, coincided with a major diplomatic move in their favor. Prompted by the Taliban's short-lived victory, Pakistan, followed by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, extended official recognition to the Taliban government. Iran and other neighbors of Afghanistan continued to honor the credentials of the ousted government of Burhanuddin Rabbani, which had kept its official representation at the United Nations. About 14 months later, the Taliban's decisive victory in capturing Mazar-i-Sharif (August 8, 1998) preceded a significant political setback for the militia. Less than two weeks later (August 20), the United States launched cruise missile strikes on suspected terrorist bases in Afghanistan. These bases were affiliated with the Saudi militant Osama bin Laden, who was linked by Washington to the bombing of two US embassies in Africa earlier that month.

Iran-Taliban Military Standoff

The dramatic turn of events in August 1998, leading to the fall of Mazar-i-Sharif to the Taliban, came as a surprise to

Iran. Internal discord among the northern allies contributed to the dashing military success of the student militia. The disappearance of an Iranian journalist and seven people that Iran said were diplomats in Mazar-i-Sharif came as a shock to Tehran. Meanwhile, international human rights groups claimed that Taliban forces had killed thousands of civilians following their takeover of Mazar-i-Sharif. Amnesty International said that Taliban fighters systematically and deliberately massacred thousands of ethnic Shi'a Hazara civilians during the first three days of their takeover.[41] The killings were apparently revenge for the massacre of the Taliban fighters who failed in their first bid to take Mazar-i-Sharif in May 1997.[42]

Responding to a nationwide outrage over the incident, on August 26, 1998, Iran announced large-scale military maneuvers (Ashura-3) by 70,000 Revolutionary Guard troops near Turbat-i-Jam, close to the Afghan border. The Taliban responded by moving troops to the border and deploying missile units there. The tension further escalated when, on September 10, the Taliban admitted that the Iranian diplomats were killed by renegade Taliban fighters acting without orders. The Taliban promised to punish the killers. Five days later (September 15), the bodies of Iranian diplomats and a journalist were brought back to emotional scenes of mass anger and grief in Tehran. The event coincided with the fall of Bamian, the last major town held by the Iranian-backed Shi'a group Hezb-e Wahdat. Amnesty International issued warnings about the possible massacre of the Shi'as in the city. With public outrage and emotions running high in Iran, the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei put his country's military on alert, although a week earlier (September 6) he had ruled out military confrontation with the Taliban. The following day, Iran announced that another nine divisions, some 200,000 troops, were on the way to conduct further military

exercises following the Ashura-3 maneuvers, which took place at the beginning of the month. This led to the deployment of about half of Iran's armed forces on the Afghan border.[43] During the same week (on September 18), the Iranian foreign minister Kamal Kharazi warned his visiting Pakistani counterpart, Sartaj Aziz, that people in Iran were pushing for military action to seek revenge for the killing.[44]

The Iran-Afghan military standoff raised the specter of armed confrontation in a region already devastated by war and internal strife. However, underneath the rhetoric, Iran's policy was governed by rational calculations and hard-nosed strategic consideration. The risks involved in the use of force were too high to warrant an armed showdown. Avenging the death of Iranian diplomats was not a pressing reason to take the risk of military conflict, and empowering Iran's Afghan allies to defeat the Taliban was hardly an achievable goal. Despite the reports that Iran concentrated half of its standing armed forces on the Afghan border, the real number of troops was believed to be a fraction of that. Further, the logistic support of a military invasion would have needed months of preparation. An Iranian invasion would also rally support in Afghanistan behind the Taliban, who vowed to target Iranian cities for missile attacks. This brought to mind the harrowing images of the Iran-Iraq war, which most of the population in Iran did not want to repeat. Militarily, there was little chance of success in an armed confrontation with Afghanistan. As an Iranian analyst argued, "Afghanistan is like a swamp and once we get in we will never get out."[45]

UN mediation in October 1998 eased the tension along the Iran-Afghan border, and the Taliban released the last group of Iranians that they held in Afghanistan. However, Iran continued to demand that the Taliban hand over or punish the killers of the Iranian diplomats and share power

with other ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Tehran maintained a large force on the border and continued to provide military support to the anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan.

The Taliban, however, failed to stabilize the country and create an effective government. The Taliban's extensive links to Pakistan (especially the ISI and extremist Islamic elements), foreign extremist networks, and wanted terrorists, including al-Qaeda, coupled with its condoning of massive drug production and its poor human rights record, resulted in the international isolation of the movement. The Taliban's imposition of far-reaching social restrictions and economic failure caused increasing domestic disapproval.

A Military Review of the Conflict

The two-way military conflict between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan (1996–2001) pitted the Pashtun-dominated Taliban movement, which controlled most of the country, against the Tajik-led Northern Alliance, or United Front (UF), headed by Rabbani and his military chief, Ahmad Shah Massoud.[46] The Taliban's stated policy was to disarm the opposition and unify the country with a strong central government under its leader, the self-styled Amir-ul-Momenin Mullah Mohammad Omar. The United Front wanted to force the Taliban into a vaguely defined power-sharing arrangement that stressed regional autonomy. The opposing forces were locked in seesaw battles in two major areas and along several smaller fronts in remote mountainous districts. The UF's control of the key Salang highway, north of Kabul, blocked direct communication between the rival militia's military groupings on the two sides of the Hindu Kush Mountains. In the north, the Taliban struggled to cut off the UF's last major ground access to the

outside world by seizing control of Sher Khan Bandar and other crossing points on the Tajikistan border.

The army (as a state institution, organized, armed, and commanded by the state) had ceased to exist in Afghanistan. Neither the Taliban-led Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan nor the Islamic State of Afghanistan, headed by the ousted Rabbani, had the political legitimacy or administrative efficiency of a state. The militia formations they commanded comprised odd assortments of armed groups with varying levels of loyalty, political commitment, professional skill, and organizational integrity. Many of them felt free to switch sides, shift loyalties, and join or leave the group spontaneously. The country suffered from the absence of a top political layer capable of controlling individual and group violence. Force was not a state monopoly.

Elite militia units, clustered around factional leaderships, played pivotal roles in combat. On the Taliban side, these troops were mostly recruited from the madrassas and were led by veterans of the previous wars waged by the Taliban. The units usually spearheaded the Taliban's military actions. The size of a unit, ranging between a few dozen and several hundred, depended on the political influence of its leader and available resources. Fighters were often identified as followers of a certain commander, usually a cleric (they were commonly referred to as *andiwals*, "comrades"). Some larger units had organic artillery, armored vehicles, and other support elements. Several units were grouped into task forces for major combat actions under temporary commands. Hundreds of former army officers and pilots (mostly ethnic Pashtuns who joined the Taliban) operated the militia's complex aircraft, armored vehicles, and artillery and air defense systems. Some former officers served as advisors to higher military commanders and staffs. Senior positions were held exclusively by the mullahs.

As the Taliban rose to power, many local Mujahedin commanders and their followers joined the movement.[47] The strength of these units depended on the level of financial support they got from the Taliban leadership. As the number of volunteers dwindled, Taliban conscription efforts intensified. Districts and villages in Taliban-controlled areas were required to furnish a certain number of conscripts for military service. The draftees had the choice to serve or to pay for a substitute.[48] Consequently, the poorest members of the community ended up serving in the military. They were often taken to war fronts without proper training.[49]

Most of the foreign militants came from Pakistani religious parties and Arab militant groups. The number of Pakistani fighters varied depending on the intensity of military activity in Afghanistan. Some estimates put the number of Pakistanis that trained and fought in Afghanistan between 1994 and 1999 at 80,000 to 100,000.[50] The number of Pakistani militants who joined the Taliban in their offensive north of Kabul in July 1999 was estimated at 3,000 to 8,000.[51] Some of them were below the age of 14.[52] While most of the Pakistanis were madrassa students sympathetic to the Taliban's "*Jihad*" and received no pay, a small number of them were trained and paid ex-military personnel serving in key specialist positions.[53] Foreign recruits were trained in Kabul at the Special Training Center in the former 7th Infantry Division's military post at Rishkhor (southwest of the capital). The "Center" trained up to 1,000 recruits at any one time in intensive courses up to six weeks. The training included the use of small arms and demolitions and leading small-group combat. Trained foreign recruits operated in platoon-sized units separate from Afghan formations.[54]

The Arab militants organized in al-Qaeda networks were concentrated in several camps, mostly in Kabul, Nangrahar, Khost, and Kandahar. The elite al-Qaeda–supported fighters

were grouped in the so-called 055 Brigade headquartered in Kabul and deployed as a whole or in parts to the most key battlefronts. The 2,000-strong brigade was integrated into the Taliban Emirate army during 1997 and was manned by mostly non-Afghan veterans of the anti-Soviet *Jihad* of the 1980s and by other, better-educated fighters coming from the other battlefronts, including Kashmir, Caucasus, and Tajikistan. The unit was dominated by Arabs, Central Asians, Chinese Muslim militants, and South and Southeast Asians. According to al-Qaeda documents retrieved in Afghanistan, the brigade was also used as the strategic incubator and reserve of the al-Qaeda global terrorist network.[55] The affiliation of the Taliban with Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda organization had opened many underground channels of financial support to the Taliban. Afghanistan was, in fact, a training ground for the transnational militants and a place to acquire primarily political stature and secondarily combat experience for their wars elsewhere. This drew non-Arab militants from dozens of other places, including Kashmiris, Chechens, Uzbeks, Uighurs, and others.[56] These units' combat reputation, formerly relatively low, increased as they acquired a veteran cadre and as professional Afghan units' skills declined.

The military forces of the United Front were also a confused assortment of armed groups but in a different way. The UF combined heterogeneous militias, semiprofessional leftovers of the old regime, former Mujahedin groups, and ethnic-regional contingents into a loosely unified opposition to the Taliban. The UF leadership made a better use of former military personnel, mostly non-Pashtuns, in command and staff positions. The dominant faction in the alliance was the armed forces of the former defense minister Ahmad Shah Massoud. The Guard formation, mostly comprising Panjsheri fighters and some Badakhshani and Takhari Tajiks,[57] was the central element of Massoud's

military machine. The distinctly uniformed unit of about 800 fighters was well trained, well equipped, and highly disciplined. It fought against the Soviet forces in the 1980s and later was organized into a Guard brigade under Commander Gada following the Mujahedin victory in 1992.[58] The Guard formation (also referred to as the Commando Brigade) was based in the Panjsher Valley after the fall of Kabul to the Taliban in September 1996. It played a pivotal role in combat operations. In later years, when the United Front received increasing amounts of military hardware, including tanks and other armored vehicles from Russia, and financial aid from Iran and India, Massoud improved the organization of his army. By mid-2001, he had restructured his army into new units of uniformed strength. They included about 26 battalions of 400 men each, organized in three rifle companies and one heavy-weapons company armed with heavy machine guns and Russian wire-guided antitank missiles. The Front's available tanks and infantry fighting vehicles (BMP I and II) numbered about 100 and were organized into two brigades, one deployed in the north and the other on the Kabul front in the Shamali plain, north of the capital. Massoud reportedly received 19 tanks and several BM-21 (Grad) multiple-barrel rocket launchers (MRBLs) in June 2001.[59]

The combat formations of Massoud's militia were grouped in two regional command "corps" or "zones." The Parwan and Kapisa Command was the successor to the former 5th Corps[60] and was responsible for the areas south of the Salang pass and northern approaches to Salang (including Andarab and Dasht-e Kilagai). Military formations of the Northeastern Zone were organized in the 6th Corps. It comprised three divisions deployed in Takhar, Kunduz, and Badakhshan Provinces.[61] Before being ousted from the capital in 1996, Massoud transferred a great number of weapons to his base in the Panjsher Valley,[62] where they

remained out of action due to fuel and ammunition shortages. There were reports that they were under the control of a largely inactive “Artillery Division.”

The size of the military forces of the opposing militias was often exaggerated. The number of their troops was not constant but changed with the operational situation. Neither faction could afford to maintain a large force continually. Both sides recruited additional fighters for the main operations. Massive recruitment, which increasingly meant conscription drives, preceded the Taliban’s major military campaigns. Students from religious schools in Pakistan and young Afghan fighters from areas under the Taliban control swelled the ranks of combat formations. In the summer of 1999, the Taliban recruited thousands of troops in Nangrahar and other provinces[63] near Kabul while thousands of Pakistani and Arab militants joined them for the Shamali operation. In noncontested areas, the Taliban government relied on local forces to hold the areas while saving its combat units for the war fronts. The strength of its militia was about 25,000 fighters, which increased to 40,000 during military operations. The United Front commanded 12,000 to 15,000 combat troops under Massoud in addition to another 10,000 troops fighting in other mountainous fronts, in Dara-i-Suf (Dostum, Atta, Mohaqeq), Bamian and Yakaolang (Khalili), Ghor (Ismail Khan), and Kunar (Haji Qadir).

Diverging Operational Concepts

The structure and operation of the opposing forces were governed by divergent conceptual trends. Mostly a product of the *Jihad* era and guerrilla warfare, the military establishment under Ahmad Shah Massoud was conceptually oriented toward a war of attrition. It was, in essence, a guerrilla force despite efforts to reorganize it into

a conventional army between 1992 and 1996. This orientation shaped the underlying principles of its tactical and operational maneuver: elusiveness was considered the key to survival in drawn-out combat; the fight for survival called for survival to fight; and trading territory for time constituted the basis of operational resilience. The UF was skilled in establishing fortified defensive lines but reluctant to defend them at all costs. It had no illusions about the tactical weight of the enemy's offensive momentum and no doubt about the effectiveness of the counteroffensive against an overstretched enemy.

The Taliban militia emerged as a motorized light force tailored for fast-paced military action against a patchwork of fragmented armed groups. Relying heavily on ethnic loyalty, bribery, and popular support, the movement acted as a law (Sharia) enforcement body before it engaged in full-fledged fighting. Fascinated by the cross-country performance of GMC[64] pickup trucks during the war with Soviet forces in southwestern Afghanistan, the militia chose the pickup truck as an all-purpose vehicle that would function in both combat and combat support roles. Suitable for fire on the move, customized Toyota and Datsun pickups served as an efficient combat vehicle, having technical and tactical "lightness" and a great deal of cross-country maneuverability. It was the principal troop carrier, lifting 10 or more militiamen who could fight in mounted or in dismounted formations. The result was the creation of a unique force of a pickup truck cavalry—a mounted force of ideologically motivated and disciplined fighters. It was extremely effective in "exploiting" the tactical success achieved through combat and noncombat actions. However, the turbaned "Hussars" had the anatomic limitations of a light force. It was hardly a match for well-organized and deliberate defensive lines. Further, the militia's mobility suffered in mountainous terrain. It was notable that the

Taliban overran about 65 percent of the country in two years (1994–1996) and captured the capital, Kabul. But in the next four years, they were able to add only 25 percent more territory to their real estate holdings.

The Taliban's swift military achievements between 1994 and 1996 mostly stemmed from the political and strategic momentum they gained through the backing of a host of internal and foreign supporters—including Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and American businesses who saw the militia's domination favorable to their political, geostrategic, and business interests. Afghan royalists, who were under the illusion that the Taliban would eventually serve their agenda, indirectly contributed to the militia's victories. The light and mobile nature of the Taliban military forces was consistent with the fast-moving combat required.

While the Taliban forces enjoyed a high level of offensive mobility, they lacked the experience, discipline, and organizational skills to penetrate prepared defensive lines or consolidate positions. In the spring of 1995 the Taliban advance stalled near Kabul for a year after it suffered heavy losses.[65] Further, the Taliban advance on Shindand was stopped by Ismail Khan's forces and was turned into a major defeat for the Taliban, forcing its retreat to Kandahar in May 1995.

In a major offensive, fighters rushed to the front line to share the glory and spoils of war, leaving their tactical formation unbalanced—a force disposition where the front was heavy and the rear was weak. This left the force extremely vulnerable to counterattack. It is always easier to maneuver reserves—which neither side had—from the depth than to shift troops along a committed front. This was clearly visible in certain military operations. The Taliban summer offensive in July 1999 (from July 28 to August 3) north of Kabul was well planned but poorly executed. The operation involved attacks on two parallel axes (the Tagao-

Nejrao axis and the new Kabul-Bagram road) while pinning down opposing forces in a third, heavily mined direction (the so-called old road from Kabul to the north).[66] The operation lasted a week and resulted in the capture of extensive territory in Parwan and Kapisa Provinces. However, the Taliban forces failed to consolidate their territorial gains by constructing defensive lines and conducting mop-up operations. Consequently, their advance was reversed by Massoud's blitzkrieg counteroffensive on August 5, which left hundreds of Taliban fighters dead.[67] Massoud's spectacular counteroffensive regained him most of the lost ground in six hours (from 2:00 to 8:00 AM). The success was due to skillful attack planning and the coordinated execution of the plan. The designated groupings in the attack included a detachment that was deliberately left behind in underground water canals (*Karez*) as the Taliban overran the area. Massoud's attack on converging axes took the Taliban by surprise. His forces captured hundreds of abandoned vehicles and hundreds of prisoners.[68] Similar seesaw combat took place several times in Kunduz and Takhar Provinces.[69]

The Unconventional Use of Conventional Weapons

Except for the Kalashnikov assault rifle, which was the standard infantry weapon, there was no standardization of combat equipment in units. Weapons in combat units had been captured in previous battles. There were small units with heavy artillery and tanks and larger formations with few support weapons. Both sides used a large variety of arms, ranging from former Mujahedin weapons adapted to guerrilla warfare[70] to SSM and SAM missiles and armored vehicles inherited from the old regime's conventional

army.[71] The tactical use of these weapons did not follow standard rules and procedures. The lack of professional skills often led to the underemployment of advanced military technology and the oversimplified use of sophisticated weapons.

Particularly notable was the poor performance in the tactical employment of armored vehicles. Tanks were the vehicles most likely to be captured intact because of ineffective mutual support and coordination between infantries and tanks. Poor technical support at the tactical level caused the loss of stalled vehicles to the enemy when a unit was forced to fall back. Certain equipment was modified in response to combat exigencies. Massoud's forces enhanced the firepower of light trucks and BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles by fitting them with 32-shot 57 mm rocket pods salvaged from combat helicopters (Mi-24 and Mi-25). They reportedly were extremely effective in fighting because of their combined mobility, firepower, and armor protection.[72] Both factions enhanced the mobility of single-barrel and multibarrel rocket launchers (BM-1, BM-12, Saqar-20, and Saqar-30) and DShK and ZGU-1 heavy machine guns by mounting them on wheeled and tracked vehicles.

Both sides adapted modern technology and sophisticated weapons to traditional methods of warfare. Instead of using artillery fire and air strikes to facilitate the maneuver of infantry, artillery and air strikes were usually used disjointedly against static targets. The systematic use of tanks and other armored vehicles as the means of combining firepower, battlefield maneuver, and shock action was rarely practiced. Instead, they were mostly employed in fire support, making them vulnerable to antitank guided missiles. In one instance, the UF forces in the Takhar-Badakhshan front destroyed nine Taliban tanks and infantry fighting vehicles in one day by antitank guided missiles.[73]

The low force-to-space ratio on extended fronts undermined the viability of the defense, allowing the attacker to break through the gaps into the depth at high speed once the first line of defense was breached. On the other hand, the same factor increased the chances of success by a well-planned counterattack against a poorly coordinated advance. In several battles, the attacker was pushed back almost as fast as his offensive had progressed. The lack of adequate military skills in using modern weapons (combat aircraft, rockets, artillery, and mortars) and poor fire control systems increased the collateral destruction, causing enormous casualties among the civilian population.

The Afghanistan air force, as a professional military establishment, had long ceased to exist. Remnants of the old regime's aviation forces changed hands during the eight years of civil war. Initially, it included 12 squadrons of combat aircraft (126 aircraft),[74] five aviation transport squadrons (about 60 planes),[75] and nine combat and transport helicopter squadrons (about 100 helicopters, including 14 combat helicopters).[76] These were deployed at five air bases around the country.[77] Some of the An-12 transporters were equipped with Soviet-designed bomb-dispensing mechanisms, allowing each to carry up to 38 250-kilogram bombs.[78] In the late 1990s most of the surviving aircraft (including about 40 combat aircraft and an assortment of transport planes and helicopters, including a few combat helicopters)[79] were under the Taliban control. They were based in Kabul, Kandahar, Shindand, Herat, and Mazar-i-Sharif. Most of the planes had outlived their operational age and many were not technically safe to fly. Rudimentary improvisation and cannibalization provided a limited number (six to eight) combat aircraft for limited missions. The United Front had only eight Mi-17s and six Mi-8 helicopters, plus four Mi-24s and Mi-25 gunships. These

were based in Takhar and Badakhshan Provinces; less than half were operational. Three An-26 transport planes and a couple of combat aircraft were based across the border in Tajikistan's Kulab military base.[80]

Neither side had the organizational and technical infrastructure necessary to use air power in its conventional role. Combat aircraft hit selected individual targets without regard to the ground operations. The psychological implications of air attacks outweighed their military usefulness, and their collateral damage was greater than the losses to intended targets. The air control system was inadequate, and coordination with ground forces was poor. In some cases, communication between the Taliban's radar stations and on-call fighter jets was provided by shoddy commercially purchased radios. The Taliban aviation's most effective role was provided by transport planes and helicopters to move troops and material and provide communication, command, and control. Due to the geographic isolation and the rugged terrain, the United Front found helicopters particularly essential to sustain its combat. Helicopters facilitated communications between Taleqan, Panjsher, and bases of UF allies in the Kunar Province.

Combat units of both militias mostly relied on local resources and cash purchases of food and other material available in the market. This often strained the local economy, causing price hikes, particularly during major military operations. The Taliban's massive shopping in Kabul and everything-for-the-front drive during the summer operation of 1999 caused acute food shortages in the area.[81] Combatants often carried much of their basic supplies with them. The tactical replenishment of ammunition and POL (petroleum, oil, lubricants) became a major challenge during offensive operations. The supply of material from strategic stockpiles to forward bases was

relatively faster and more efficient than combat zone replenishment. The system did not effectively support extended or lengthy operations. One of the reasons for the quick reversal of military actions was poor logistics support.

The Decline of the Taliban

The populist support that helped the Taliban to explode into power and dominate about 90 percent of Afghanistan's territory in about five years took a downturn as the militia failed to live up to the expectation of those who supported them. The Taliban won public support for their pledge to end fighting, disarm the people, and establish the rule of law on the basis of Islamic Sharia. As their rule wore on, other factors made them unpopular even among their own Pashtun constituencies. These included the harsh treatment of non-Pashtun ethnicities, particularly Tajiks and Hazaras, the rigid and extremist interpretation of Islam in running the government, in variance with the mainstream Islamic norms of Afghan society, the dependence on Pakistani intelligence and the al-Qaeda terrorist network, economic failure, and driving Afghanistan toward international isolation.

In March 2001, the Taliban caused a widespread international outcry by destroying the huge historic Buddha statues carved in the mountain face some 1,500 years ago. Although their decision was said to have been based on Islamic religious considerations that prohibit the exhibition of idols, it was used as an instrument of pressure on the international community to lift sanctions on the movement and recognize the Taliban government. The idea of destroying the Buddhist relics was floated around for months, apparently to influence the international community. During this period, UNESCO and many nations, particularly countries where Buddhism is a dominant religion, including Japan and Sri Lanka, repeatedly appealed

to the Taliban to leave the statues alone. Japan even offered money to save the Buddhas, but to no avail. The destruction of the statues further isolated the Taliban and increased sympathies to their archenemy, the Northern Alliance. The Taliban's eventual ban on poppy cultivation and its effective enforcement did little to improve the image of the militia.

Six months later, the Northern Alliance's charismatic leader, Ahmad Shah Massoud, was assassinated in a suicide attack on September 9 by al-Qaeda agents posing as TV journalists. Two Tunisian Arab journalists, holding European passports, were devoted bin Laden adherents and were recruited for a suicide mission. Abdesattar Dahmane, a resident of Belgium, went to Afghanistan in mid-2001 and joined his fellow suicide bomber, Bouraoui el Ouaer, there. The agents used contacts among the Mujahedin, including Abdur-Rab Sayaf, to get permission to interview Massoud at his base in northern Takhar Province. To cover their design, they had first conducted interviews with Northern Alliance soldiers in Shamali, north of Kabul, before meeting Massoud. Right at the beginning of the interview with Massoud, Dahmane triggered a bomb hidden in the camera, which fatally wounded the Northern Alliance commander. His co-conspirator made an attempt to escape but was chased and caught by Massoud's men and was killed on the spot.

My review of the case, when I served as the interior minister of Afghanistan (from January 2003 to October 2005), was inconclusive, as some of the witnesses and persons of interest failed to provide the details. The plot was to remove the only obstacle in the way of the Taliban's full control of Afghan territory. It was also speculated that the attack may have been intended to stave off an effective partnership between the Northern Alliance and the United States, who would possibly act in retaliation following the impending attack on the Twin Towers and other US targets on 9/11. But, with or without Massoud, the consequence of

their 9/11 terrorist attacks cost al-Qaeda and the Taliban dearly. US retaliation, as discussed in the next chapter, put an end to the Taliban rule in Afghanistan, and in less than three months the Taliban government was overthrown, the al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan was disrupted, and its leadership was on the run.

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12 The US Invasion, the Fall of the Taliban, and the Bonn Process

2001–2005

Nearly 13 years after the last Soviet soldier left Afghanistan, the first American soldier landed in Afghanistan to begin a new war triggered by terrorist attacks in the United States by the al-Qaeda global terrorist network based in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. The war again catapulted Afghanistan into the world center stage and opened a new chapter of violence that is yet to be closed (as of the publication of this book). The suicide attackers who crashed hijacked passenger planes into the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon in Washington, and a field in Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001, were linked to Osama bin Laden's worldwide terrorist network, al-Qaeda, which was centered in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. However, none of those who committed the dreadful crime were Afghan nationals, nor was the violence inspired by Afghan politics. The tragic event that cost about 3,000 innocent lives and enormous material damage marked a new turn in an international war on terrorism and ushered in a new phase in the drawn-out civil strife in Afghanistan.

Sadly, it took this devastating human tragedy for the United States to reengage in the region after a decade-long

detachment following the pullout of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan and the end of the Cold War. It was during this period that war-torn Afghanistan further slipped into violence and political chaos, leaving a dangerous power vacuum. The vacuum was eventually filled by the extremist Islamist regime of the Taliban, which hosted the wealthy Saudi militant Osama bin Laden, who became a major source of financial support to the internationally isolated Taliban administration. The emerging partnership-in-need allowed bin Laden and his terrorist al-Qaeda network to use Afghanistan as a training ground and base of operations for their worldwide terrorist ventures. The situation turned Afghanistan into a major source of instability in the region and beyond. As the details of the war still remain classified, the general outline of military operations discussed in this chapter are based on open sources and accounts of the Afghan and American participants in the conflict.

The decision to retaliate against the terrorist attack was taken swiftly by President George W. Bush after it was confirmed that al-Qaeda was behind the act. It did not take long. The attack on America was not considered simply an act of terrorism but an act of war. The response was preparations for the “War on Terror,” which began as early as the day after 9/11. The Central Command had not developed any plans for conventional operations in Afghanistan. During the 1990s, in spite of the civil war in Afghanistan and the establishment of al-Qaeda camps there, US diplomacy in support of the UN efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Afghan imbroglio lacked consistency and perseverance. Washington’s false hopes that the Taliban would be able to end the war militarily soon collapsed as the neofundamentalist militia proved to be the worst kind of human rights abusers, record-setting drug producers, and hosts to the notorious terrorist network led by Osama bin Laden. Washington’s pinprick cruise missile strikes in 1998 against bin Laden’s reputed terror training camps in

Afghanistan, in the wake of the bombings of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam, only raised bin Laden's global standing among the anti-West militant groups. Further, the weak response helped create the perception that US retaliation against future terrorist attacks would only inflict minimal pain. The lack of international attention to the foreign-inspired conflict in Afghanistan haunted the world community in tragic ways. But 9/11 resulted in a major change. Now Washington did have the stomach for a ground war, albeit one waged differently than the one fought by the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s or the one conducted by the United States in Iraq in 1991. It had to be a different war: "No more token retaliation. No more million-dollar TLAMs [Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles] into empty tents. No more pinpricks."[1]

The strategic concept for such a war needed to be unique. The goal was to destroy al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and overthrow the Taliban, which hosted the terrorist network. The center of gravity in the strategy was breaking the Taliban military might that accommodated and protected the al-Qaeda network. Initial assessments of the situation at the Central Command (CENTCOM) headquarters found a full-fledged conventional ground offensive neither feasible nor desirable. Given the failed experience of the Soviets in Afghanistan, where the occupation troops became entrapped in fixed garrisons while subject to continued attacks by mobile and agile guerrilla forces, a conventional ground offensive was seen as a replication of the same scenario. It was assumed that a ground offensive would put coalition troops in static positions, allowing smaller Taliban detachments the freedom of action that could surround the fixed concentrations of enemy forces in hundreds of isolated pockets, a mini–Dien Bien Phu. Further, the concentration of large forces for a ground offensive in a landlocked country with an uncertain political situation in the neighborhood was another major challenge precluding a swift response to the

al-Qaeda attacks by large-scale military offensive. The movement of troops with the support of a large number of helicopters flying over the high mountain passes in Afghanistan was another obvious obstacle.

Instead, it seemed more plausible to reverse the pattern by neutralizing the Taliban's fixed concentrations and vital targets with an intensive air war, paving the way for ground attacks by mobile and flexible groups of indigenous anti-Taliban forces covered by close air support. The essence of such a plan was forwarded by the CIA as early as September 13. CIA director George Tenet later wrote,

> Ours was a strategy unlike any other in recent American history. The plan CIA laid out for the president on September 13 and expanded at Camp David two days later stressed one thing: we would be the insurgents. Working closely with military Special Forces, CIA teams would be the ones using speed and agility to dislodge an emplaced foe. Our plan was to build on relationships that had been carefully forged with regional [Afghan] factions over recent years to give us allies who might help oust the Taliban. This war would never be "Americans against Afghans," we told the president. Rather, it would always be about helping Afghans rid their own country of a foreign menace, al-Qaeda, and of the Taliban, who had allowed terrorists to hijack their country.[2]

The War Strategy

The strategy crafted by the CIA overlooked the long-term implications of relying solely on the Northern Alliance as their partner in the war and excluding the Pashtun opposition to the Taliban for equal assistance. Obviously the non-Pashtuns—Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras—coalesced in the Northern Alliance were the only organized anti-Taliban force, but they were also discredited by their past infighting, which was one of the reasons that the Taliban had earned popular support by driving them out of most of the country. Further, over the years, the Taliban policies alienated large sections of the Pashtun tribes and politicians, who were willing to rise against the Taliban and their foreign militant allies. The CIA,

however, favored investing in the readily available forces of the Northern Alliance instead of going through the longer path of building and mobilizing a multiethnic anti-Taliban political front and empowering it through military assistance to replace the Taliban.

Once a conventional ground offensive was taken off the table, two other options were closely looked at: an overwhelming air campaign of short duration to neutralize the Taliban defense, enabling the anti-Taliban forces to complete their defeat; and a more extended bombing operation followed by an "assisted" advance by the international coalition forces.[3] Because of the weakness of the Northern Alliance and the fragmentation of other anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan, it was not expected that these Afghan forces would be able to defeat the Taliban following a short air war. The Northern Alliance commanded 12,000 to 15,000 central combat troops in addition to local armed groups clustered around different warlords. There were about 200 barely serviceable tanks and other armored vehicles and dozens of artillery pieces and heavy mortars. Although the troops had been fighting for years, they were no match for the highly motivated Taliban fighters, who were supported by thousands of Arab militants and tens of thousands of Pakistani "volunteers." Other smaller pockets of anti-Taliban resistance in the west, southwest, and northeast of the country were too disorganized to put up a decisive fight. The administration therefore decided to wage a longer air bombing campaign to destabilize the Taliban military might and drastically change the correlation of forces in favor of anti-Taliban forces. This was to be followed by a second phase in which the indigenous Afghan militias would be assisted militarily by the coalition with direct air support as they advanced against the Taliban. This was the option of choice for the offensive termed "Operation Enduring Freedom."

Planning for the war at Tampa, with contributions from the British Defense Staff and Ministry of Defense, was finalized quickly—in a week or 10 days. The aim of the offensive operation was to destroy al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and overthrow the Taliban. It was not clear what was to be done afterward. The shock of 9/11 and the political urgency facing the Bush administration required fast action. Therefore attention was focused on the immediate strategic objective. The complexities of the political and geographic context required the resolution of many issues in order to shape the environment for military action in Afghanistan—a landlocked country halfway around the globe and hundreds of miles from the nearest logistic support bases in the Middle East. These complexities were not addressed until much later—and then not fully.

The Campaign Plan

There were four phases to the campaign. In the first phase, which had started immediately after 9/11, the focus was setting the political and strategic conditions and building the forces for military action. The second phase was the conduct of an initial military operation involving destabilizing the Taliban forces with an intensive air war and defeating them in ground attacks by local Afghan forces, which would create the conditions for the third phase follow-on operations by around 10,000 coalition ground forces. The fourth phase extended to three to five years to consolidate success, by preventing the reemergence of the terrorists and providing for humanitarian assistance.[4]

One of the main tasks during the first phase was forming a coalition of allied forces and winning cooperation from other nations, who were given the choice by Washington of being “with us or against us.” This choice was particularly important in the case of Pakistan, the principal supporter of

the Taliban. Former Pakistani president Parvez Musharraf later wrote that US secretary of state Colin Powell asked him to decide whether Pakistan was with America or with the terrorists. This was echoed by Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage to Pakistan's ISI chief as, "If we chose the terrorists, then we should be prepared to be bombed back to the Stone Age. This was a shockingly barefaced threat, but it was obvious that the United States had decided to hit back, and hit back hard."[5] Musharraf saw it in the best interest of his country to side with the United States—a decision the Taliban ambassador to Islamabad, Mullah Zaeef, considered betrayal of a "brother" out of fear.[6]

During the first phase, efforts were made to build the coalition for the "War on Terror" and to mobilize and deploy forces for credible military action. This included basing and staging agreements with Afghanistan's neighbors, moving combat and naval assets to the region for support of ground operations, and inserting CIA operatives into the bases of anti-Taliban forces inside Afghanistan with sacks of ready money in order to bolster "the fractured Northern Alliance and tribes in anti-Taliban opposition." Also, clandestine efforts by CIA operatives were made to convince the Taliban leadership to join the coalition against al-Qaeda, which had hijacked their country. It was aimed at co-opting influential Taliban leaders and having Mullah Omar hand over bin Laden to face justice or help the coalition catch him. Further, in case Omar failed to cooperate, ways were explored to oust him and replace him with dissident Taliban leaders. The CIA station chief in Islamabad, Robert Grenier, was heavily involved in the effort, contacting, meeting, and negotiating with the Taliban representative until the fall of Kandahar.[7]

Other efforts were conducted through diplomatic channels that involved the White House, Pentagon, and the State Department as well as CENTCOM. It was through these efforts that overflight agreements with Pakistan and

Afghanistan's Central Asian neighbors, including Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, emerged. Staging areas for military operations and search-and-rescue missions were established at Karshi-Khanabad (K-2) in Uzbekistan and Jacobabad in Pakistan.

The second phase began at 9:00 PM Kabul time on the clear evening of October 7, 2001, less than one month after 9/11. Air strikes hit Kabul, Kandahar, and other major Afghan cities. The operation involved 31,000 men and women around the world and in the region, 393 aircraft, and 32 ships, with the participation of 31 nations. The key targets included al-Qaeda and Taliban command and control installations, radar and communication centers, air defense systems, airfields and combat aircraft, terrorist training camps and troop concentrations, logistic depots, and military transportation facilities. There were limited numbers of such targets, and these were hit by Tomahawk missiles, tactical aircraft, B-2 Stealth bombers flying from the United States and B-52s flying from the British island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. Each of the B-52 bombers was dropping 25 tons of precision-guided munitions on a single sortie. The focus of the air war throughout October was to destroy the military might of al-Qaeda and the Taliban and alter the correlation of forces in favor of their local opposition forces, building the condition for the ground attack by them. However, due to the lack of on-site forward air controllers to direct air strikes to where forces opposing were in direct contact, air attacks on the front line of the main al-Qaeda and Taliban force groupings fighting the Northern Alliance did not occur.

Turkmenistan
Uzbekistan
Tajikistan
Mazar-i-Sharif
Kunduz
Taloqan
Operation to capture Mazar-e-Sharif
Operation to capture Kunduz
Afghanistan
Movement from Panjsher to Kabul
Bagram
Kabul
Tora Bora
Operation to catch Osama bin Laden
Operation Anaconda
Shahi Kot
Karzai's move from Uruzgan
Pakistan
Kandahar
Sherzai from Quetta
Operation Enduring Freedom, October–December 2001
Battle
Landing Zone
Military Action
0
100
200
300 Kilometers

Operation Enduring Freedom, October–December 2001.

During the same period Special Operation Forces (SOF) were deployed to forward bases, awaiting insertion into the positions of key Northern Alliance commanders and other tribal commanders to help target and control air strikes in support of their ground combat. An advanced CIA team, codenamed Jawbreaker, headed by Gary Schroen was inserted into the Panjsher Valley as early as September 26 to lay the ground for partnership with the anti-Taliban Afghan forces. The team carried a significant sum of money to pay the warlords and finance the Northern Alliance operations. The CIA also provided weapons, clothing, and other supplies to the ragtag militia of the Northern Alliance, which was badly demoralized after the assassination of its charismatic leader, Ahmad Shah Massoud. The militia was cornered by the Taliban in the northeastern confines of the country in untenable positions along the Tajikistan border. The tiny sliver of land was linked to the Panjsher Valley, its political homestead, by high mountain passes. During the 40 days that Jawbreaker was in the area, it spent five million dollars and committed ten million more, which was sent later.[8] The money was distributed mostly to Northern Alliance commanders for the procurement of military equipment and as payment for humanitarian assistance to the population.[9] Another CIA advance team with sacks of money was inserted in the second week of October in Dara-i-Suf to coordinate the partnership between the coalition forces and the Northern Alliance militia there and to distribute funds to local commanders, including General Dostum, Atta Mohammad, and Haji Mohammad Mohaqeq. The CIA teams were contacting local commanders to win their partnership in the war, and once they made the commitment they were assisted with food, medical supplies, and military equipment, which were dropped to them by aircraft. During the two months from mid-October to mid-December 2001, US aircraft

delivered over 770 metric tons of goods in 108 airdrops to 41 locations throughout Afghanistan.[10]

The three main elements of military action in this phase were the coalition air strikes, the local militia, and the SOF that connected the former two. Following days of bombing, the coalition expected that the Taliban's military establishment would turn hollow inside and fragile on the forward lines, ready to be attacked by a ground offensive by the anti-Taliban local militia. The offensive would be covered by the direct air support provided by the international coalition forces and by the Special Forces teams working alongside the militia to coordinate their activities in successive ground offensives in order to laser-guide US air power onto the Taliban and al-Qaeda targets on the front lines. This triumvirate kinetic force functioned only with the presence of Special Forces teams working hand and glove with different contingents of anti-Taliban local forces. The SOF teams communicated the GPS data of the location of the troops and guided the direct support coalition aircraft onto Taliban and al-Qaeda targets facing the local allied militia. The core of the SOF teams in Northern Afghanistan, called Task Force Dagger, was under the command of Colonel John Mulholland and was formed from the Kentucky-based 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne). Although the task force had deployed forward to the K-2 base (Karshi-Khanabad) in Uzbekistan, difficult weather and terrain conditions repeatedly delayed or prevented the insertion of these teams to the front. Further, bureaucratic departmental turf battles in Washington over ownership of the war added to the delay. Consequently, the ground operation could not begin earlier, in spite of the insistence of the Northern Alliance, which impatiently looked forward to shifting the air strikes to the front lines north of Kabul and south of Mazar-i-Sharif.

The Main War Fronts

The Northern Alliance was locked into two major areas and along several smaller fronts in remote mountainous districts. In the south, it faced the Taliban forces north of Kabul on the Shamali plain at the Bagram-Charikar front and maintained control of the key Salang highway, cutting direct communication between the Taliban's military groupings on the two sides of the Hindu Kush Mountains. It was organized into the Parwan and Kapisa Commands, which were responsible for the areas south of the Salang pass and the northern approaches to the Salang (including Andarab and Dasht-e Kilagai).

In the north, the beleaguered opposition forces faced overwhelming Taliban forces on two main axes: the Dara-i-Suf mountainous valley leading to Mazar-i-Sharif in the south; and the Takhar Province front in the northeast with access to Kunduz. Dara-i-Suf is a mountainous valley that snakes southeastward into the folds of the Hindu Kush, running along a river with the same name, which joins the Balkh River near Shulgara, just south of Mazar-i-Sharif. The valley is flanked by high mountains, while side valleys connect it to Samangan and Baghlan Provinces in the east, Bamian in the south, and Sar-i-Pul in the northwest. Tugged into this cul-de-sac of hilly confines, the narrow valley is easy to defend against attacking forces. The anti-Taliban forces in this sector consisted of the Uzbek, Tajik, and Hazara militias commanded by General Rashid Dostum, his frequent rival the Tajik commander Atta Mohammad, and Haji Mohammad Mohaqeq, respectively. They collectively commanded a force numbering up to 7,000,[11] which faced enormous challenges. Their supplies were seriously depleted, the men were on reduced rations, and ammunition was running low. The militia had repeatedly attempted horseback attacks against the Taliban's strong defenses on the Safed Koh ridges at the northern gates of the Dara-i-Suf Valley during the summer of

2001. These attacks failed and, in some cases, Taliban counterattacks forced them farther back into the valley. The Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters were well entrenched in bunkers and placed tanks on the high ground.

The Takhar front to the northeast was the main front of the anti-Taliban resistance in the north and was where the Alliance was headquartered. Military formations of the Takhar front were organized into the 6th Corps. It comprised three nominal divisions deployed in Takhar and Badakhshan Provinces.[12] The front stretched from the Amu Darya River to the Hindu Kush massif in the south. The opposing forces were mainly deployed in the northern sector just south of the Tajikistan border, where the bulk of the Northern Alliance troops occupied a defensive line east of the Khanabad River, opposing the Taliban positions, and they extended for about 10 miles to the south, anchoring on rugged terrain rising up to the Hindu Kush peaks.

The concept of the operation for the ground offensive was to defeat the Taliban in the north by seizing control of two key cities: Mazar-i-Sharif and Kunduz. The fall of the two cities would knock the Taliban off balance and lead to the fall of other towns north of the Hindu Kush. Such a move could lead to a weakening of the Taliban defenses north of Kabul, resulting in their retreat to the south, which could then be targeted from an advantageous strategic position.[13] Further, with the early defeat of the Taliban in the north, the ground transportation route from Uzbekistan would open to supply northern Afghanistan. This plan was also supported by the Northern Alliance leader General Fahim, who succeeded the late Ahmad Shah Massoud. In a meeting on the tarmac of Dushanbe Airport in Tajikistan where General Tommy Franks met Fahim, the latter suggested that Taleqan, Kunduz, and Mazar-i-Sharif should be the immediate objectives, freeing up the airfields for the use of coalition airplanes. This, he said, would be followed by the concentration of his forces on the southern front centered in Bagram for the advance on Kabul,

but he would not enter the capital until given permission by the American Command.[14] The domination of Kabul by the Northern Alliance was believed to be a sensitive issue that could trigger another civil war, pitting the Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbeks of the north against the majority of Pashtuns. CIA planners saw this as the biggest problem: how to "foster cooperation with the mostly Tajik tribes in the Northern Alliance without alienating the country's Pashtuns, largely in the south."[15]

It was for this reason that initially the CIA experts were divided on whether to depend solely on the Northern Alliance in the war. One faction, particularly those serving in Pakistan, argued against a close alignment with the Northern Alliance. The other faction believed that the Americans could not wait for wider opposition forces to rise up in the south and that in the interest of quick action the United States should take advantage of the Northern Alliance's willingness to fight the enemy right away.[16] Meanwhile, efforts were underway to mobilize and unify the anti-Taliban Pashtun opposition forces to fight the Taliban in the south, particularly in Kandahar.[17] The ISI too was engaged in a British-funded move to mobilize selected Pashtun commanders they supported to enter the fray in order to balance the role of the Northern Alliance in the war.[18] But this effort was conducted at a slow pace and with limited resources, while the CIA was obsessed with the convenience of working with the Northern Alliance.

Diversionary Raids on Kandahar

As military operations in the north were under way, American commandos launched two bold diversionary raids on October 20, 2001, in and near Kandahar, the spiritual capital of the Taliban and the main base of al-Qaeda leadership. One of the raids was made on a desert airstrip at a hunting camp 35 miles southwest of Kandahar. This camp

was constructed and mainly used by the Arab guests of the Taliban for a hunting base. The facility, later named Camp Rhino, became a Forward Operating Base (FOB). It was surrounded by a 10-foot wall and four fortified towers, and included an airstrip on a dried lakebed. Several warehouses and offices and a small mosque were built within the camp, which was also bisected by a three-foot-deep cement moat. On the early morning of October 20 at 1:00 AM local time, four MC-130 aircraft dropped a detachment of 199 Rangers from the 75th Ranger Regiment. Covered in the air by circling AC-130 gunships, the Rangers swiftly secured the objective and cleared the enemy compound without resistance. Once the landing zone was secured, a unit of Special Operation Forces landed in helicopters and conducted additional raids on targets in the area. Some resisting Taliban men were killed and several Americans were wounded. The Rangers took several prisoners. After five and a half hours on the ground, the troops were exted in MC-130s. A little over a month later, on November 25, a marine expeditionary force landed and was based in Camp Rhino. At its peak, 1,100 US marines, under the command of Brigadier General James Mattis (who later commanded CENTCOM), served there along with other US soldiers and sailors and Australian commandos.

The other diversionary raid on the same night was conducted in the heart of Kandahar city against the compound of the Taliban leader Mullah Omar. An elite Special Mission Unit (SMU) code-named Task Force Gecko launched from the *Kitty Hawk* carrier floating in international waters off the coast of Pakistan. Several MH-47 Chinook helicopters, supported by an AC-130 gunship and covered by a predator drone, flew into the night. The task force assault-landed on the compound to “take the site by force, to capture and kill any enemy found there and to exploit the target for intelligence.” Gecko scoured the maze of rooms in the

compound, finished its mission, and departed on the waiting helicopters.

General Tommy Franks later wrote,

> This two-part operation also had a strategic purpose. Attacking the Taliban's heartland would demonstrate that we could strike anywhere, at any time of our choosing. And this would serve to fix the Taliban's limited forces in the south. If we threatened his stronghold in Kandahar, Mullah Omar would not send his reserves north to reinforce the Taliban and al-Qaeda units garrisoned along the Uzbek and Tajik borders. Indeed it was in the northern mountains, not the southwestern desert, where we would focus our main effort.[19]

The Battle for Mazar-i-Sharif

Special Force teams (A-teams), formally known as Operational Detachments Alpha (ODA), were each made up of 12 highly specialized trained men and were inserted into different sectors after mid-October. One team was dropped into the Panjsher Valley on October 17 and linked up with the CIA advance group under Gary Schroen. Another team was inserted on October 19 into Dara-i-Suf at General Rashid Dostum's headquarters. Two weeks later, on November 2, another Special Forces team was inserted into the camp of Commander Atta Mohammad, a lieutenant of General Fahim.

The teams were air-landed by modified CH-47 Chinook helicopters[20] some 250 miles south of the K-2 base in Uzbekistan after a two-and-a-half-hour hazardous night flight over high mountains during extremely poor weather. The insertions were accomplished without major incident, although there were a number of instances of ground fire directed into the night sky. With the deployment of the Special Forces teams, the operation entered a new stage of tactical combat along the Taliban lines weakened by air bombardment. The A-teams were there to call air strikes on confirmed Taliban and al-Qaeda targets and to laser-guide the strikes onto these targets.

Between October 19 and 24, the team operating with Dostum was split into two elements. One rode on horseback north into the mountains near Keshendeh Bala along with General Dostum to help him plan the attack on Mazar-i-Sharif. The other moved south into the nearby Almatak Mountains in the southern Dara-i-Suf Valley to contain the Taliban forces moving from side valleys and to prevent them from reinforcing their units around Mazar-i-Sharif. After another Special Forces team linked up with Commander Atta Mohammad on November 2, the combined forces of Dostum and Atta began advancing northward from Chapchal and Keshendeh toward Shulgara, the main district south of Mazar-i-Sharif.

The close air support from B-1 and B-52 bombers and F-14, F-16, and F-18 fighter bombers eroded the forward lines of the Taliban and opened the way for the advance of the Afghan militias moving on horseback in separate columns under Dostum and Atta while accompanied by the Special Forces teams. They broke the forward defensive lines of the Taliban on November 5 near the junction of Dara-i-Suf and the Balkh Rivers and moved north. In less than two days, intensive air strikes called by the Special Forces teams destroyed over 20 armored vehicles and 20 support vehicles. The Taliban’s shifting reinforcements from Mazar-i-Sharif, Shulgara, and Kholm only provided more targets for the close air support aircraft. In the fierce battle, many of the Taliban’s key command posts, armored vehicles, troop concentrations, and antiaircraft artillery pieces were destroyed. Hundreds of enemy troops were killed, and the survivors fled north to Mazar-i-Sharif. Meanwhile, part of the horseback-mounted A-team moved south to link up with the troops of Dostum’s partner, Haji Mohammad Mohaqeq, and helped prevent the southern Taliban from assisting their forces in the north. From November 5–7, the A-team helped destroy over 65 enemy vehicles, 12 command bunker positions, and a large enemy ammunition storage bunker.

Exploiting their break through the Taliban lines south of Shulgara, Commander Atta and Dostum's anachronistic twenty-first-century cavalry advanced through Shulgara to deal with the next and last main defensive line of the Taliban in the critical Shulgara gorge, located just south of the city of Mazar-i-Sharif. Flanked by craggy hills, the gorge is about a half-mile wide and contains a stretch of the Balkh River flanked by a narrow road. The Taliban forces were well entrenched on their defensive line, which was covered by direct-fire heavy weapons, including tanks and ZSU-23-4 (*Shilka*) light self-propelled antiaircraft guns, and supported by BM-21 multiple-rocket launchers. When the attacking troops approached the gorge on November 9, the Special Forces teams moved into a forward mountain observation post and targeted the Taliban defenses on the northern side of the pass with close air support destroying their vehicles, a number of antiaircraft guns, and numerous troop concentrations. However, after the Dostum-Atta force came repeatedly under effective enemy BM-21 multiple-rocket launcher fire, the Special Forces team requested B-52 heavy bombing runs, which finally broke the Taliban resistance. They began retreating to Mazar-i-Sharif and beyond.

When the city was within their reach, the competing Northern Alliance commanders began racing to reach the falling city first. During the night of November 9 and into the next morning, Atta watched large motorized convoys of Taliban fleeing the city to Kunduz; he seized the opportunity and moved his motorized and horse-mounted columns toward the city through the gorge. He entered the suburbs of the city during early morning to the welcome of the excited population. During the day, Atta's troops cleared the streets amid sporadic shooting by the Taliban who had stayed behind. A part of Atta's troops rushed to the Dehdadi airport and publicly announced that Mazar-i-Sharif had fallen to Commander Atta.[21] Undaunted by Atta's assertiveness, Dostum led his horse-mounted army of 1,500 into the city

several hours later and took over his former headquarter at the Qala-i-Jangi fort. After settling his troops into the fort, he moved into the city and reopened Hazrat Ali's Shrine (referred to as the Blue Mosque by foreigners).[22]

But the war for the city was not over. At least 520 young Taliban, mostly Pakistani, who were left behind after the Taliban fled, were holed up in the Sultan Razia girls' school which, had been closed since the Taliban took over the city in 1998. They seemed determined to fight to the death. Bombing the compound was seen as the only way to destroy the group, although preventing collateral damage in a spiritually significant and densely populated area was a major problem. Once the decision was made to bomb the school, the CIA and Special Forces team made many efforts to get the exact GPS coordinates of the school to pass on to close support aircraft. When the bombs hit the target and the building collapsed on top of the fighters, some survivors struggled out of the smoking compound only to be chased through the streets by an angry mob that cut some of them to pieces. Only about 30 militants survived. They hid in the corner of the building, which was still standing, and continued to exchange fire for two more days with Atta's men. They finally surrendered.[23] This ended the battle for Mazar-i-Sharif, but the violence did not stop at once. In the rest of the city, armed militia hunted down suspected Taliban for on-the-spot executions. Others went on a spree of looting. Some buildings, including the UN compound, were ransacked thoroughly, down to their windows frames. This blood and plunder marred the victory celebration.

The fall of Mazar-i-Sharif had a domino effect throughout the north. The Alliance forces swept across the north in the wake of their victory in Mazar, seizing control of several provinces, including Samangan, Sari-Pul, Sheberghan, Jawzjan, and Balkh. The local Taliban commanders either switched sides or were bribed into cooperation. Other Taliban spread out across the country and tried to hide. A day after

the fall of Mazar, Karim Khalili, the leader of the Hazara Hezb-i-Wahdat party, and his troops, who had been cornered in the mountain districts of the country for several years, emerged from their hideouts and with the support of a Special Force A-team descended on demoralized Taliban troops to drive them out of Bamian and Pol-i-Khomri in Baghlan. The captured cities suffered from mass looting and retribution. In the west, Commander Ismail Khan, based in the Ghor Mountains, was helped by a Special Forces A-team and rapidly moved on Herat, which fell without much resistance.

The Battle of Kabul

The disintegration of the Taliban forces in the north also weakened the Taliban's five-year standoff against the Northern Alliance forces on the Kabul front, where they were dug in on the Shamali plains, just 50 kilometers north of Kabul. The front line passed through the heavily damaged Bagram Air Base, which was in Northern Alliance hands. After the insertion of Special Forces into the Panjsher Valley on the night of October 19, the A-team moved on October 21 into Bagram and linked up with the commanders of Northern Alliance forces headquartered in Jabal-Seraj. Establishing their observation post in the old traffic-control tower of the Bagram airfield, in full view of the Taliban positions on the Shamali plains, they called air strikes onto the entrenched Taliban forces. From October 21 through November 14, 2001, the Special Forces directed available close air support missions against the dug-in enemy.

The Northern Alliance forces, however, would move only when they were sure that the Taliban positions were sufficiently degraded by aerial bombing and that their troops were weakened and unable to put up strong resistance to the advancing columns. They assumed that the bulk of the

coalition's enormous air power was for their support and wanted to maximally utilize it so that it opened the way for an easy advance. More than one month after the beginning of the air war (October 7), no major town had fallen, and the Northern Alliance commanders insisted that the Taliban positions had not been destroyed adequately. They pressed for more and more air strikes on them. The situation caused so much concern that Washington even contemplated Americanizing the war by sending large numbers of US ground forces. On the battlefront north of Kabul, where the Northern Alliance's 3,000 militiamen faced some 7,000 Taliban and their foreign allies along a 35-mile front, the bombing of Taliban positions was not considered strong enough to break their might. The Northern Alliance commanders asked for more intensive air strikes and saturated bombing. The Central Command, however, had focused the main effort in the north against Mazar-i-Sharif and allocated most of the air assets to that front.[24] But even there the progress was initially slow.

But soon the bombing on the Taliban lines on the Shamali plains, north of Kabul, was stepped up as the Northern Alliance demanded. The heavy bombing became so saturated that the Taliban fighters lost their nerve and were hit by an enormous shock-and-awe effort, forcing them to give up resistance.[25] In contrast to the precision raids of the previous weeks, the continual carpet-bombing of the Taliban trenches laid long trails of bombs across the countryside. These included "daisy cutter" bombs, the biggest in the world. The bombing smashed the enemy defenses and precipitated a sudden collapse. The unexpected rapid breakup of the Taliban forces allowed General Fahim's forces to launch an attack on the crumbling Taliban lines on November 13, and he rapidly advanced to Kabul without meeting serious resistance. The advancing columns covered 12 kilometers in two hours.[26]

During the afternoon of November 12, while bombing continued on targets of opportunity, opening the way for the attacking forces, panic-stricken Taliban hordes in Kabul scrambled to get on whatever vehicles they could find to flee east to Jalalabad and south to Kandahar. Some Taliban commanders commandeered private taxicabs and trucks, packed them with their fleeing men, and pushed off. In Kabul, the Taliban retreat began on the afternoon of November 12. Shortly after, the retreating Taliban convoys streamed out of the Afghan capital, and the advanced elements of the Northern Alliance entered Kabul—more than five years after they left it in the face of Taliban advance.

A small group of Arab militants had hid themselves among the trees of the Shahr-i-Now Park in the center of the city. At sunrise on November 13, they ambushed the first wave of Alliance fighters as they approached the area. Firing automatic rifles and machine guns and tossing hand grenades, the militants engaged the newcomers in a fierce shootout that lasted about a quarter of an hour. The militants were killed to the last man, leaving 20 dead bodies on the ground.[27] With the fall of Kabul, the Northern Alliance, contrary to the arrangement previously agreed upon to stop short of Kabul pending the formation of a broad-based administration, moved in force into the capital to the welcome of the citizens. Burhanuddin Rabbani, the exiled former leader, was confirmed as president, and he reincarnated his previous administration from the time before he fled Kabul in September 1996. Accordingly, General Fahim was appointed minister of defense, Dr. Abdullah was given the ministry of foreign affairs, and Mohammad Yunus Qanuni became minster of the interior. This caused serious complications in the all-party internationally sponsored talks to form a post-Taliban government in Afghanistan.

The Battle of Kunduz

In the north, after the fall of Mazar-i-Sharif, several fugitive Taliban detachments clustered around al-Qaeda and other foreign fighters concentrated in Kunduz, northeast of Mazar-i-Sharif, for a desperate last stand in the north. Unlike Mazar and Kabul, where the Taliban failed to put up a stiff resistance, they seemed determined to make a resolute stand in Kunduz. There, in addition to over 10,000 Afghan Taliban, some 3,500 al-Qaeda and other foreign militants, including Arabs, Chechens, Central Asians, and Pakistanis, were holed up, and they saw the situation as a matter of life and death. Further, several hundred Pakistani ISI officers and soldiers from the Frontier Corps who were assisting the Taliban were trapped there.[28] As the retreating militants joined the Kunduz garrison and added to the Taliban forces, the US military focus and its main effort were shifted to that front. The Northern Alliance's forces in the area converged on Kunduz. They included General Daud's military units in Takhar in the southeast, and General Dostum and General Atta's contingents in the south and southwest.

In addition to Special Forces teams attached to the Dostum and Atta columns, another team was inserted on the Taleqan front on November 8, which linked up with Daud. The day after the fall of Mazar-i-Sharif, the Special Forces team set up its observation post at a spot overlooking Taleqan and got ready to call in direct air support; Daud forces launched the attack on November 11, and by the end of the day, Taleqan fell with little opposition. The further advance to Kunduz was not that easy. On November 13, as the Alliance forces zoomed out of Taleqan, they were hindered by a Taliban counterattack that soon brought the advancing column almost to a standstill. The Special Forces team worked in three shifts, maintaining a round-the-clock air attack on enemy positions, and repelled the Taliban counterattack. The attacking forces, however, failed to make a blitz through the

Taliban lines and push all the way to Kunduz. Instead, Daud decided to entrench his forces at a midway position facing Khanabad, from where he intended to grind down the Taliban defenses with direct support air strikes and create the conditions for resuming the attack or forcing the enemy to surrender. Meanwhile, the advance of the Dostum-Atta forces invested the city from the south and the west. During the next 10 days, the Special Forces teams targeted the Taliban positions in and around Khanabad and Kunduz, inflicting heavy losses (some 2,000 killed or wounded) on the Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters. The air strikes also destroyed scores of tanks and other vehicles and smashed bunkers and supply dumps.

The intense bombing crumbled the militants' defenses in and around Kunduz. Khanabad was captured by Daud's forces, and the noose around Kunduz tightened. Seeing that their position was hopeless, the Taliban sued for peace and offered to surrender on November 23. The following day, Kunduz, the last Taliban stronghold in northern Afghanistan, was under Northern Alliance control. The accounts of Special Forces in Mazar-i-Sharif indicate that Mullah Fazl, the deputy defense minister of the Taliban who commanded the Taliban forces in the area, traveled to Mazar on November 21 with a large escort to negotiate the terms for surrender. In the course of face-to-face talks at Dostum's headquarters in the Qala-i-Jangi fortress, US helicopters patrolled overhead. The Taliban leader asked for safe passage in exchange for a payment of a half-million dollars.[29] The surrender terms gave the Afghan Taliban the option of joining the Northern Alliance forces or returning home. Satisfied with the terms, Mullah Fazl returned to Kunduz to arrange for the surrender process. While Kunduz was on the verge of surrender, Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf struck a deal with top US leadership for a pause in bombing and the opening of an air corridor for Pakistani transport planes to ferry their hundreds of officers and soldiers from Kunduz. There were reports of

several Pakistani planes landing in Kunduz and evacuating their men.[30]

Amid the fierce competition of the rival Northern Alliance commanders to seize the military hardware of the defeated enemy, including tanks and other armored vehicles and artillery pieces, the long convoys of 3,500 surrendering Taliban and their foreign supporters arrived in Mazar-i-Sharif on November 24 and were eventually moved to Dostum's massive Qala-i-Jangi fortress without being thoroughly searched and disarmed. There, they joined large numbers of other Taliban prisoners taken in the Battle of Mazar-i-Sharif. At the fortress, US intelligence officers started to interrogate the prisoners on November 26. Some 600 of the prisoners, mostly Arab, Pakistani, and other hardline militants, attacked the guards, snatched their weapons, and quickly took over part of the fortress. Two CIA officers attached to the Dostum-Atta columns were trapped. One of them, Johnny Spann, was killed, becoming the first US casualty in the war, while the other managed to escape. Dostum sent a regiment of 700 of his troops to quell the rebellion while nearby Special Forces men organized a team of US and British Special Forces to infiltrate the facility and bring back any friendly personnel held by enemy forces. They met heavy fire from small arms and grenade launchers. An air bombardment of the rebels' positions entailed risk to friendly forces since they were dangerously close to the rebels.

During the next five days and nights, while the Special Forces continued to exchange fire with the militants, who were determined to fight to the death, bombers, fighter bombers, and AC-130 gunships, guided by ground spotters, engaged enemy targets with air strikes. Further, an infantry platoon from the 10th Mountain Division, operating from Uzbekistan, arrived at the fortress and secured the perimeter around the fort to block enemy escape. The five-day standoff was finally brought to an end when the last holdout bunkers in the fortress were flooded with water. Only some 100 out of

an initial 600 militants survived to surrender.[31] Dostum lost about 100 of his men. Five US soldiers and one British soldier were wounded by an errant 2,000-pound bomb that landed too close. The surviving militants who surrendered included the “American Taliban,” John Walker Lindh, who had joined the movement sometime before September 11.

The bloody standoff at the fortress was followed by a greater human tragedy when thousands of Taliban prisoners were stuffed into 30 large container trucks where they could not breathe except through holes punched by gunfire, and were transported en masse to Dostum’s substandard jail in Sheberghan. Survivors and witnesses later told investigators that General Dostum’s men crammed the prisoners into metal shipping containers without food or water where many suffocated. Others were shot to death by guards. Only a handful of prisoners survived in each container. According to a UN official, in one container only six survived out of 220.[32] The thousands of dead were then taken out to the Dash-i-Leili desert and dumped in large pits dug by bulldozers. The act, considered by many as a massacre and war crime, later became a major issue pursued by international human rights organizations. The political sensitivities in Afghanistan, however, prevented the government and its international allies from pursuing the case, even after officials from the FBI and the State Department along with the Red Cross and Human Rights Watch tried to press the matter. The physician for Human Rights Watch, which discovered the mass grave in 2002, later reported that the site had been tampered with.[33]

The War in the South

When Taliban-controlled cities in the north were rapidly falling, and Kabul was about to be lost to the invading forces, the bulk of the Taliban forces were being concentrated in the south in greater Kandahar and to the east in Nangrahar. The

Northern Alliance could hardly move south due to the lack of support among the Pashtuns. The coalition realized that without the participation of Pashtuns in the south against the Taliban, the situation could trigger an ethnic civil war if the Northern Alliance attempted to expand control further to the south from Kabul. Such a situation could replicate the civil war of the 1990s, pitting the Pashtun-dominated Taliban against the non-Pashtuns from the north.

Among the Afghan national leaders, Hamid Karzai and Abdul Haq were the leading Pashtun figures who were building anti-Taliban fronts in the south. Neither received significant support from the CIA until the closing stages of the war, when the need to support the anti-Taliban Pashtun forces in the south became an essential factor in overthrowing the Taliban and disrupting the al-Qaeda network. The situation in the south was now the game changer.

Abdul Haq had unsuccessfully lobbied the US government to support his plan for an anti-Taliban revolt in the south. Although an experienced military leader and highly respected Mujahedin commander, Abdul Haq lacked sufficient resources when he rushed into Afghanistan. This was against the advice of CIA officials to not enter Afghanistan “until he mustered more forces” to fight the Taliban.[34] But seeing time as the crucial factor, he ventured into the country with a small escort before coalition bombing had weakened Taliban control. Abdul Haq had planned to converge on his immediate objective in the mountainous district of Azra, 80 miles southeast of Kabul. However, his arrangements with some tribal elements based in Pakistan and Afghanistan were not coordinated well. Nor was he supported by the US forces—there was no CIA insertion, no Special Forces team. Most of Haq’s tribal allies either failed to reach the area in time or were blocked by Taliban forces. Consequently, Abdul Haq, who was not prepared to fight and lacked critical coalition support, insisted that he was only

interested in mobilizing the tribes and bringing peace to the country through talks and peaceful settlement. He did not realize that the defiant Taliban were not interested in talks but rather were after his head.[35] The ill-fated, well-intentioned, and imprudent commander and his 19-man party were surrounded in the narrow valley of Azra in Logar Province. Frantic calls from his Peshawar office and his American supporters (including Robert McFarlane, Reagan's national security advisor) to CENTCOM for help only resulted in a belated Hellfire missile being fired from a predator drone at Taliban troops.[36] A Special Forces A-team (ODA-574) at K-2 was ordered to insert and rescue him, but before it was ready to move, Abdul Haq was dead.[37] He and his group were surrounded and captured by the Taliban and driven to Kabul, where, before entering the city, the Taliban interior minister, Abdul Razaq, personally shot him in the early morning of October 29.

The failure to save Abdul Haq sensitized the US command to act more expeditiously in helping the other prominent Pashtun leader in the south—Hamid Karzai. On November 3, the ODA-574 Special Forces team was now ordered to move on short notice to link up with Karzai.[38] The latter had established a tribal network to challenge the Taliban in their own political homestead of Kandahar. His anti-Taliban tribal constituency, however, needed US support to help it stand up against the Taliban power in the south—the same kind of support that enabled the Northern Alliance, which was cornered by the Taliban in a small enclave area in the northeast, to explode out from its last pockets of resistance and capture the main cities in the north and the Afghan capital in less than six weeks.

Karzai clandestinely left Quetta for Kandahar in the second week of October. He had three men on two motorcycles[39] and a satellite phone. From a village in the suburbs of Taliban-controlled Kandahar, Karzai proceeded by taxi to

Urozgan—narrowly escaping capture by the Taliban at a checkpoint.[40] He had laid the groundwork for anti-Taliban resistance in the greater Kandahar area for years and had won increasing sympathy from the tribes after his father, Abdul Ahad Karzai, a popular moderate politician and a prominent leader of the Popalzai tribe, was assassinated in July 1999 by two Taliban gunmen on a motorcycle outside a mosque in Quetta.

In Urozgan, Karzai stayed at the home of a mullah he knew from the *Jihad* years. There he met with four tribal elders. One of them asked him whether the Americans were with him as they were with the Northern Alliance. Karzai showed his satellite phone as proof of American support. Another elder told him that if the Americans really wanted to support him, "pick up that phone of yours and call the American to drop a bomb on the Taliban command in Tirin Kot. I will show you the location, so that we know they really want to support us." When Karzai responded that he could not do that, the elder retorted, "Then you will never win." Before the meeting ended, the mullah told Karzai that the Pashtuns needed proof that the United States was behind them before they would rebel. "The people are sick of the Taliban," said the mullah. "They will stand behind you. But the Taliban will fire their cannons, crush our homes, and send the flesh of our women and children into the trees. Our lives are not good—it is not the Afghanistan we remember—but it is still life. Get the Americans to come, and we will fight."[41]

Hoping for eventual help, Karzai moved to the Durji hills, northwest of the provincial center of Tirin Kot, with a handful of armed supporters. When the Taliban became aware of his whereabouts, they intended to intercept him. In order to rescue the Afghan leader, the CIA organized an emergency evacuation by helicopter and, on November 3, flew him with seven tribal leaders to the safety of Jacobabad Airbase in Pakistan.[42] In Jacobabad, Karzai linked up with a Special

Forces A-team (ODA-574) under Captain Jason Amerine and a seven-man CIA team, and they planed the anti-Taliban Pashtun uprising in Urozgan. The area was selected as the base of operation by Karzai for its rugged terrain. It is accessible only through limited routes and is easily defendable.

The plan for creating an uprising would start when the 11-man Special Forces A-team ODA-574 took Karzai, along with a nine-man CIA element, and infiltrated into Urozgan. They then would establish a guerrilla base in the mountains of Urozgan, from which to mobilize the tribes to fight the Taliban. After building sufficient forces, they planned to lay siege to the provincial capital, Tirin Kot. Then they would advance on Kandahar. On November 10, Karzai's supporters, who had accompanied him to Jacobabad, were sent in advance to Urozgan to gather up to 300 tribals as the first step to building an insurgent army, since the Americans insisted on evidence of a tribal mobilization in the south. Four days later, the Special Forces team and the CIA elements flew from Jacobabad across the border to the mountains of Urozgan and linked up with Karzai and his small band of supporters. The first batch of weapons delivered to arm and train this group of 300 guerrilla fighters included 300 AK-47 assault weapons with 150,000 rounds of ammunition, five PKM Russian machine guns with 200,000 rounds, and 100 RPG launchers. On the following day, the group camped in a mountainous redoubt southwest of Deh-Rawood at a camp the Special Forces named the Haji Bahadur Cove.

After brief preparations, 10 motor vehicles carrying Karzai's small force and the Special Forces team moved to Deh-Rawood and from there east to Tirin Kot. Inspired by the US-backed anti-Taliban operation, the inhabitants of Tirin Kot rose up against the Taliban and expelled their officials as Karzai's force approached the town. After Karzai victoriously entered Tirin Kot, on November 17, the Taliban command

dispatched a force of 500 men in 50 vehicles to retake the city. Karzai's force deployed on the approaches to the town and blocked the Taliban column as the Special Force team directed air strikes, which pounded the Taliban lines, inflicting heavy losses on them. Stunned by the power of the sudden blow, the Taliban hastily retreated. Thus Tirin Kot became the first liberated city in the south and turned into the main operational base for the advance on Kandahar. Meanwhile, the ranks of the Karzai army swelled after the victory as hundreds of volunteers joined the force, growing to about 800 men. Support for the anti-Taliban revolt soon spread across the area, with villagers flying Afghanistan's three-colored national flag instead of the Taliban white standard.

Preparations to move south were completed in less than two weeks, during which the Special Forces team trained, armed, and organized the rebel army. On November 30, Karzai's force streamed out of Tirin Kot and moved through the narrow passes toward the village of Petaw (also known as Petawek), which they reached around 10:00 PM the same day. During the two-day halt at the village, the Special Forces team brought in weapons, food, and clothing for the growing army. The force moved south to Shah Wali Kot on December 2. On the way, the force met stiff resistance by the Taliban at a key point near the Arghandab River. The Taliban forces were holding a ridge and repelled repeated attempts to dislodge them. It took the tribal force about two days and a heavy air bombardment to break the Taliban defenses and open its way to Shah Wali Kot. The success on December 5 was marred by a fatal accident when a stray 2,000-pound bomb landed in the middle of the Special Forces' position. Three Americans were killed and dozens wounded, along with many of their Afghan allies—the worst US casualty figure in the war up to that time. Karzai was slightly injured with bruises on his face.[43] The Special Forces team called for a medical evacuation and treated the survivors as they

waited. The same helicopters that came in to evacuate the wounded brought in another Special Forces team to fill in for the broken team. Meanwhile, the same day brought Karzai the good news that he was selected by an all-party meeting of Afghan political factions in Bonn, Germany, as the chairman of the interim administration in the post-Taliban government in Afghanistan.

On December 6, when the force was on the road again toward Kandahar, Karzai, now the leader of the new Afghanistan, called on the Taliban leadership to hand over Kandahar. Mullah Omar sent a delegation, including his defense minister, Mullah Obaidullah, that sued for peace. According to Karzai, the Taliban delegation presented a letter of surrender to Karzai, whom they recognized as the legitimate leader of Afghanistan. There were no conditions attached to the letter of surrender. The Taliban had agreed to hand over Kandahar and adjacent provinces. Karzai handed back the letter to the Taliban delegation, asking them to broadcast it over Kandahar Radio, which they did.[44] Then Karzai designated Mullah Naqib to take charge of Kandahar. Assuming that the peace agreement would grant amnesty to top Taliban leaders, including Mullah Omar, Washington reacted strongly against it. The Bush administration issued a stern warning that the United States would challenge any agreement by the Afghan government-in-waiting that granted amnesty to Mullah Omar or leaders of the al-Qaeda terror network, which the United States blamed for the September 11 terror attacks.[45] The situation encouraged certain US-backed militias to attack the former Taliban leaders who had returned to their homes, forcing them to go underground and then flee to safe areas across the border under Pakistani protection, from where they soon renewed fighting against the US-backed government and international forces. Meanwhile, Karzai entered Kandahar triumphantly and established a new administration before leaving for Kabul, where he was inaugurated on December 22.

The anti-Taliban uprising north of Kandahar coincided with another move from the south headed by Gul Agha Sherzai, the pre-Taliban governor of Kandahar. As noted earlier, while the United States reached out to the Northern Alliance and took the anti-Taliban non-Pashtun faction as a partner in the war, in Pakistan the ISI was commissioned to mobilize some former Pashtun Mujahedin commanders to enter the fight on the side of the international coalition and lead Pashtun tribal militia in the south against the Taliban. This Pakistani project had mixed results, since some ISI-linked former Mujahedin commanders had lost credibility in Afghanistan and commanded little influence inside. They simply joined the anti-Taliban bandwagon for material gains. A number of other exiled former Mujahedin played useful roles, particularly in the eastern Pashtun provinces, while many others failed. In Quetta, the CIA supported and funded Gul Agha Sherzai, who had close ties with the ISI, and helped him to lead a tribal militia raised to conduct military action in Kandahar. A Special Forces A-team was attached to the group to help provide international direct air support for the operation.

The southern militia infiltrated into Afghanistan on November 18, 2001. They came through the Shin Narai Valley, northeast of the main Spin Boldak access road, to avoid Taliban interference. The Shin Narai road was developed by the Mujahedin during the 1980s as a main infiltration route into the country. The route then branched out in the Arghistan district into a network of routes running north, east, and west to the Mujahedin fronts. As the militia was heavily outnumbered by the Taliban troops in the area and was operating in open country, it tried not to get engaged in fighting with the Taliban in the border area. Its immediate goal was to get to a position as close to Kandahar as possible, entrench there until air bombardment weakened the Taliban defenses, and then launch the final assault on the city. Meanwhile, the Special Forces team expeditiously

moved to provide weapons, food, and other supplies for the militia of 800 tribesmen. On November 21, negotiations with the Taliban in the border area failed when the Taliban refused to surrender; Gul Agha decided to bypass the Taliban lines and cut across the Arghistan plain to Takhta-Pul on main Highway 4, located 25 miles south of Kandahar.

The militia, riding in over 100 different types of vehicles, left the border infiltration point on the morning of November 22 and, after two days of unopposed advance, hit the Taliban defenses south of Takhta-Pul. Sherzai's offer for talks was rejected by the Taliban commander, who attacked the militia from its well-prepared positions. The Taliban resistance, however, did not last long. It took a few air strikes called and directed by the Special Forces team to break the Taliban's will to resist, and they vacated the town and fled to Kandahar. The Sherzai militia entered Takhta-Pul on the morning of November 24, severing the main highway between Kandahar and Spin Boldak. The militia established security outposts to the north and south as its position was threatened from Kandahar in the north and from Spin Boldak in the south (which it had bypassed). The northern outposts were almost in sight of the major airport at Kandahar and began receiving indirect artillery fire from the airport.

In the south, the Taliban forces in Spin Boldak began to move north along the main highway to hold defensive positions approximately three miles from the southern element of Sherzai's outposts. The Taliban position there was seriously deterred on November 25 by the sudden deployment of a US Marine Corps force at Camp Rhino, some 35 miles southwest of Kandahar.

During the next two weeks, Sherzai's force was entrenched at Takhta-Pul since he did not feel strong enough to attack Kandahar but waited for the enemy forces to be weakened under the weight of constant air strikes and heavy bombing. In early December, as Sherzai was about to launch his attack, his forces came under repeated Taliban

counterattacks, which he repelled with the help of coalition air strikes. On December 7, as he prepared his force to launch the final assault on Kandahar, he was suddenly informed that the Taliban had completely evacuated Kandahar as a result of Karzai's negotiations. He immediately gathered his personal security force and, along with a small Special Forces' element, rushed into the city toward the governor's mansion, his former home. The city had fallen without a shot. The remainder of the Special Forces' team moved to Kandahar on the following day.

The Battle of Tora Bora

As the last bastion of the Taliban power in Kandahar was falling to the US-backed tribal militia, the military turned its focus to the mountainous region of Tora Bora, south of Jalalabad. There, it was believed, Osama bin Laden was holed up in fortified caves along with Taliban and al-Qaeda troops. Right from the beginning of the air war, bin Laden was forced to leave Kandahar for Kabul, and from there (around November 10), just before the fall of Kabul, he left for Jalalabad with his close followers, his wives, and his children. The Tora Bora complex, built around several natural caves during the years of *Jihad* against the Soviet occupation, served as one of the main strongholds of the Khales party of Mujahedin in the 1980s and was frequented by bin Laden, who contributed to its development. The complex has a number of alpine escape routes to the Pakistan-controlled Kurram Valley, where the al-Qaeda leader had created a sphere of influence among the Pashtun tribes. Osama did not stay long in Jalalabad and, by November 13, he climbed into his convenient mountain abode in Tora Bora, accompanied by his household and up to 2,000 al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters.

Fascinated by the news of the “last stand” of al-Qaeda, the media played up the story, reporting the events at the Tora Bora “cave fortress” with much hype and many sensational accounts. Some reports overestimated the complexity of the caves, as though they were cavern castles built for the villain in a James Bond film. There are thousands of natural caves across the mountainous landscape of Afghanistan; many more caves and tunnels were built during the guerrilla war against the Soviets in the 1980s. They served as supply depots, transfer stations, resting places, and combat staging areas. They were not meant to be defensive complexes: guerrilla forces prefer to take surprise actions, not to defend. Tora Bora was an operational-logistic base similar to the famous Zhawar cave complex in Khost Province. A member of the US Special Forces A-team who fought in Tora Bora later spoke on a television program broadcast by PBS, saying that

> again, with the caves, they weren’t these crazy mazes or labyrinths of caves that they described. Most of them were natural caves. Some were supported with some pieces of wood maybe about the size of a 10-foot by 24-foot room, at the largest. They weren’t real big. I know they made a spectacle out of that, and how are we going to be able to get into them? We worried about that too, because we see all these reports. Then it turns out, when you actually go up there, there’s really just small bunkers, and a lot of different ammo storage is up there.[46]

Another misperception was the role of the cave complex in al-Qaeda’s fighting tactics. The military significance of underground strongholds is closely linked to the prevailing political and strategic situation. During the Afghan-Soviet war (1979–1989), the Mujahedin and their supporters controlled the countryside. Fighters often lived among the local people. Soviet columns, therefore, could not afford to wage drawn-out military actions against the mountain positions. Most Soviet raids lasted just a few days. This was in stark contrast to the conditions under which al-Qaeda militants were fighting. They were extremely isolated and surrounded by a hostile local population. Their supply lines were cut off, and they were subject to heavy pounding from

the air. Such a context gravely lessened the military value of underground installations. They could serve as shelters; they could as easily serve as tombs. Al-Qaeda was in fact fighting a rearguard battle, looking for the opportunity to slip over to Pakistan. As I noted then in an article published by the *New York Times* on December 8, 2001, the most effective way to fight those who hold a cave is to surround the complex and wait them out. Instead of going inside the caves, attackers should force the cave warriors to emerge to fight under conditions unfavorable to them. Time was not on the militants' side. Nor were the Afghans and their allies in a rush to flush out the burrowing enemy. They could block the escape routes and wait and work toward what Sun Tzu called "the best victory without much fighting."[47]

Being a highly political and emotional issue, the pursuit of bin Laden, the mastermind of the terror attacks on the United States, could hardly be looked at in purely military terms. There was an urgency to hunt him down in the mountains, where he was cornered, and do it very rapidly, under the gaze of constant public attention around the world. Since only a small US ground force was available in the region, the campaign to go after the al-Qaeda fugitives in the Tora Bora canyons was subcontracted to Afghan warlords, similar to arrangements made with local anti-Taliban warlords and tribal militias elsewhere in the country. The ground attack in Tora Bora was initiated on December 3 and developed in two phases. In the first phase, lasting a week, the caves were attacked on three axes by the Afghan warlords' militia. The militia under Haji Zaman Ghamsharik, a Pashtun former Mujahedin commander of the nearby Khogiani District, was assigned to the western half of the Tora Bora mountain base, moving south into the Tora Bora canyons from the western flank. The forces under Hazrat Ali, an ethnic Pashayee warlord associated with the Northern Alliance, were to operate in the center, while Haji Zaher, the son of the chairman of the Nangrahar governing *Shura* was

leading his men on the eastern flank, helped by other axes. US Special Forces' teams helped coordinate this unconventional attack by mostly bringing air power to bear. Meanwhile, the Pentagon had asked Pakistan to move forces close to the border to block the enemy escape routes.[48] The second phase began with a cease-fire, supposedly to discuss the terms of surrender, on December 12 and ended on December 17, during which hundreds of al-Qaeda fighters, including bin Laden succeeded in escaping the caves to Pakistan.[49]

Advancing on parallel axes, Hazrat Ali and Haji Zaman collectively fielded some 2,500 poorly trained men, supported by a number of Soviet-made tanks and armored vehicles at the base of Tora Bora. Constant turf battles between the two commanders, deepened by their long history of political differences, undermined their cohesiveness and their commitment to the mission.[50] Further, the confused political and security condition in the areas made the militiamen susceptible to making deals with al-Qaeda and the Taliban for safe passage. The competing Afghan commanders, quarreling endlessly, moved up the mountains in cold weather in the fasting month of Ramadan. Their men were no match for al-Qaeda fighters, hidden from view at 5,000 feet and in a series of deep canyons, valleys, forests, and caves. Nor were the militiamen as motivated to fight as their desperate enemies. Many of them looked at it as a daytime job and would leave their posts for the evening meal, and some even returned home for the night. In their absence, the enemy could retake the positions they had lost.

This pattern of moving up and back, two steps forward and a step back, slowed the advance into the enemy position—the forward line of which was about one mile from the bottom of the mountain. On some occasions a cave would change hands twice in one day.[51] The Special Forces attached to the mission arrived on the third day of the

campaign with the mission of assisting the militia by calling in air strikes on enemy targets to destroy the militants and their fortifications and open the way for the advance of Afghan fighters. Their stated mission was to destroy and eliminate the al-Qaeda presence there and capture Osama bin Laden or any of his senior deputies. After the arrival of three dozen Special Forces' teams supported by the Delta Force[52] and US Special Forces, the teams laser-guided air strikes and bombing on the Tora Bora fortifications. But in spite of a rain of heavy bombs, including a 15,000-pound "daisy cutter," on the enemy positions, the Afghan militias were making slow headway.

The al-Qaeda fighters were never threatened from the back, and as they were pushed up the ridges of the Spin Ghar Mountain, they had their escape routes open except when they were targeted by chance air strikes. The use of GATOR mines to block the passes was overruled by some members of the international coalition.[53] Pakistan's cooperation in sealing its border to fleeing militants was not reliable. Therefore, in the absence of US troops that could block the escape routes, the militants in Tora Bora fought a rearguard battle. They suffered heavily under the weight of the air bombardment and lost many men, but they managed to slip over into Pakistan in large numbers. Colonel John Mulholland, the commander of the 5th Special Force Groups, whose teams were helping Afghan anti-Taliban forces, including on the Tora Bora front, later spoke on a PBS TV documentary, saying that "[with] American forces on the ground, we would have had a more conventionally confident force to do conventional search, seizure, isolate, cordon and search operations. But that search force wasn't available yet, and there was great impetus to do something to move up into these mountains. So we were asked to supply an A-team up in there to assist." The head of a Delta Force commando team, Dalton Fury (not his real name), was sent to the area after the CIA identified bin Laden's location in Tora Bora. He

proposed launching an operation to attack bin Laden's suspected position from the rear, over a 14,000-foot-high mountain separating Tora Bora from Pakistan. His plan was rejected. His suggestion of dropping GATOR mines in the passes leading from Tora Bora to the Pakistan-controlled Kurram Valley was also denied.[54]

As noted earlier, on November 25, a marine expeditionary force (along with other US soldiers and sailors as well as Australian commandos) had landed and was based at Camp Rhino under the command of Brigadier General James Mattis. Mattis later told a *New York Times* reporter that he was convinced that with the forces at his disposal he could have surrounded and sealed off bin Laden's lair and deployed troops to the most sensitive portions of the largely unpatrolled border with Pakistan. He argued strongly that he should have been permitted to proceed to the Tora Bora caves. But he was turned down.[55] About a week later, the second phase began marking the turning point in the battle. On December 12, assuming that al-Qaeda might decide to fight to the last man, causing heavy losses to his men, Haji Zaman reached out, through some intermediaries, to open talks with bin Laden's commanders and then engaged directly in talks with them, offering a cease-fire. The move angered the US forces, but they had little leverage to stop it. Hazrat Ali was also in secret talks with al-Qaeda. The militants indicated that they would surrender only to the United Nations, but they put the Afghans on hold for a final response. The resultant lull in fighting provided an opportunity for the militants to arrange for escape. American intelligence officials are said to believe that some 800 al-Qaeda fighters escaped that night in addition to those who had already left. A number of others, including bin Laden, stayed behind with the rearguard; according to American intelligence estimates, bin Laden left on December 16 on horseback directly south across the mountains to Pakistan. He was accompanied by bodyguards and aides while other

al-Qaeda leaders dispersed along different routes. The families of the militants, including those of bin Laden, were sent earlier along the main routes to Pakistan in November and early December.

The next day (December 17) when the Afghan militiamen advanced to the last Tora Bora bunkers, no one of any significance was found there. All the VIPs were gone. Only 20 sick militants were taken prisoner. A large number of militants escaped with the help of Afghan militia commanders who were bribed. About 600 to 800 others were escorted by Pashtun guides from the Pakistani side of the border at an average cost of $1,200 apiece.[56]

Given the initial objective of the Tora Bora campaign, the operation failed to achieve its goal. Many military analysts charged that the operation was a failure because of insufficient troops on the ground to entrap bin Laden. The Bush administration and military commanders, however, argued against this criticism by claiming that there was no definitive information that bin Laden was even in Tora Bora in December 2001. General Tommy Frank later told a PBS interviewer that

> in early December . . . it became obvious that the opposition forces with whom we were working in the vicinity of Jalalabad and down toward Tora Bora themselves don't like Al Qaeda at all, didn't like the Taliban at all. [They] had a desire to take their forces, which were substantial at that time, and move them on a sweep operation through Tora Bora. [They] put together an operation. We supported that operation.[57]

This is a denial that the operation against Tora Bora was a US-originated campaign. In the spring of 2005, the Pentagon, after a Freedom of Information Act request, released a document to the Associated Press that said Pentagon investigators believed that bin Laden was at Tora Bora and that he escaped.[58]

The Bonn Conference

The rapid development of the coalition military campaign to overthrow the Taliban outpaced arrangements to form a viable political entity to succeed the Taliban regime. On October 1, exactly one week before the beginning of the US military campaign in Afghanistan, exiled former Afghan king Mohammad Zahir Shah met with anti-Taliban commanders of the Northern Alliance and an 11-member American congressional delegation in Rome, where they discussed the mechanisms to ensure that all ethnic groups were represented in a post-Taliban government.[59]

But urgency for the serious consideration of the political future of Afghanistan was not initially visible among the international actors. The US-led international intervention was basically a military response to the 9/11 attacks with no clear political vision for the post-Taliban period in Afghanistan. The first shot of the war was fired less than one month after the 9/11 catastrophe. During this period all plans and strategic arrangements in support of their implementation had a military focus, with little attention to the postconflict period. Even as late as October 4, Washington had no specific plan for the post-Taliban government in Afghanistan: President Bush asked his national security team, “Who will run the country?” There was no clear answer.[60]

It was in late October 2001, some three weeks after the beginning of the military operation, that Washington appointed an envoy to the Afghanistan opposition forces to help coordinate the formation of a broad-based post-Taliban government. When Ambassador James Dobbins was offered that responsibility, the undersecretary of the State Department explained to him that “the military campaign was beginning to gain momentum but that the political track was not keeping pace. America was committed to overthrow the Taliban regime in Kabul but had, as yet, no clear idea of what group could be put in its place or how to do it.”[61]

During the next month, the newly appointed UN envoy to Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi, worked with senior representatives of key coalition members to convene a conference at which all relevant political factions would participate and form a new Afghan government. Brahimi planned to invite delegations representing four different opposition factions. They included the Northern Alliance, mostly representing the Tajik, Uzbek, and Shi'a factions; the exiled Rome faction, headed by Zahir Shah, the elderly former king, who had led the political opposition against the Taliban; and two other, less-substantial groups representing the émigré leaders residing in Pakistan and other opposition figures linked to Iran.

The coalition expected that the formation of a broad-based government would precede the fall of the Taliban in Kabul. But the Taliban's sudden evacuation of the capital opened the way for the Panjsheri-led Tajik faction of the Northern Alliance to seize control of the city in defiance of international demands. The victors immediately reincarnated the pre-Taliban bureaucracy dominated by the Shura-i-Nazar Tajiks.[62]

With Kabul occupied by the Northern Alliance, it was hard to bring together all the political forces in Afghanistan without substantial external pressure, including from those who had influence over different factions. One of the major challenges was to get a consensus on the venue of the meeting and help the parties reach a comprehensive agreement on the composition of the post-Taliban government and the path of the country's political future. The pledges of international aid were seen as the indispensable incentive for the factions to unite in an all-inclusive government, since only under such an arrangement could the international community assist in the reconstruction of Afghanistan after more than two decades of war, violence, and destruction.

During his meetings in mid-November with the former Afghan king in Rome and with the Northern Alliance foreign minister Abdullah in Tashkent, Ambassador Dobbins got the two factions' agreement to participate in a UN-proposed international conference to form a broad-based new government, although the early fall of Kabul created several new hurdles that needed to be cleared. First, after occupying Kabul, the Northern Alliance insisted on convening the all-party meeting in the Afghan capital. Second, the Northern Alliance ministers, including Abdullah and the interior minister, Yunus Qanuni, displayed reservations about offering the two smaller delegations equal status with the Northern Alliance and the Rome group in the proposed conference. Third, since Burhanuddin Rabbani still headed a government that enjoyed official international recognition, and held the Afghan seat at the United Nations, his returning to the capital and resuming residency in the presidential palace exacerbated the formation of a broad-based inclusive government on a level field. In fact, Rabbani had already invited all Afghan groups to Kabul for talks on a new government. Fourth, the occupation of Kabul by the northerners worried the Pakistanis, who, in a meeting with the visiting American envoy, Ambassador Dobbins, expressed fears that the undisciplined Northern Alliance troops would engage in unbridled acts of reprisal and plunder, prompting violent Pashtun responses that could cause instability and destruction. Islamabad strongly insisted that the Pashtuns should dominate any representative Afghan government. They were concerned that a government dominated by the Northern Alliance would tilt toward India and be hostile to Pakistan.[63] It was partly for this reason that Secretary of State Colin Powell flew to Islamabad to reassure President Musharraf that the US partnership with the Northern Alliance militia forces in fighting the Taliban did not mean that the Northern Alliance would lead a post-Taliban government in Afghanistan.

In order to defuse the emerging tension, James Dobbin, accompanied by Abdullah, traveled from Tashkent to Kabul less than a week after Kabul's fall to meet with the political and military leadership of the Rabbani government in order to persuade them to dissolve their administration and join other anti-Taliban factions in a government that would be more broadly based. The key ministers, including Abdullah, Qanuni, and General Fahim, supported the idea of joining other factions in a national government as demanded by the United States. But there were others who were less flexible. Burhanuddin Rabbani, who had consistently made claims to the office of president ever since he had assumed power in 1992, was reluctant to hand over power. Nevertheless, the influential troika (Fahim, Abdullah, and Qanuni) clearly understood that their administration had no choice but to become part of a broader national government. It was during this trip that Abdullah told Dobbins that his group maintained that Afghanistan's next leader should be a Pashtun and should come from outside the Northern Alliance. They, however, were not in favor of King Zahir Shah playing such a role due to his advanced age—in spite of his wide popularity among Afghans of different ethnicities. Responding to Dobbins's inquiry about who was acceptable to the Alliance as the leader of post-Taliban government, Abdullah named Hamid Karzai as an acceptable choice.[64]

Dobbins found the suggestion promising and interesting. Indeed, a few days earlier in Pakistan, the ISI chief, General Ehasan-ul-Haq, had proposed that Hamid Karzai might be an acceptable choice to head the next Afghan government.[65] Even before that, the Turkish government was the first to suggest that Karzai would be a good candidate to head the new Afghan government. Later, on the eve of the Bonn conference, the Russian and Indian envoys expressed positive views of Karzai as an acceptable candidate for the top job.[66] Within the Northern Alliance, close aides to the

slain leader Ahmad Shah Massoud were in favor of Karzai, with whom they had worked in the Mujahedin government and who interacted with the late Massoud in the late 1990s, when the latter was leading the anti-Taliban resistance in Northern Afghanistan. They considered Karzai a moderate and conciliatory person capable of holding a fractious coalition together. The Northern Alliance's support of Karzai was the main driver behind the regional unanimity in his acceptance. Of course, Pakistan had its own reasons to support Karzai as the candidate to lead the next government in Afghanistan.

The intense multifaceted diplomatic efforts succeeded in bringing together the four anti-Taliban Afghan factions in late November 2001 at a UN-organized conference in Bonn, supported by all the stakeholders and the great powers. The Afghan groups represented at the conference included the Northern Alliance; the "Rome group," loyal to former king Mohammad Zahir Shah; the "Peshawar group," mostly Pashtun exiles based in Pakistan; and the "Cypress group," comprising exiles with ties to Iran. The first two groups were represented by 11 delegates each, while the two others attended each with five delegates. Pakistan lobbied for the inclusion of moderate Taliban delegates, but they were excluded from the conference. Earlier, as Qatar was eyed as the venue of the conference, the Qatari government agreed only on the condition that the Taliban should also be included.[67] Eighteen foreign countries sent representatives to monitor the talks, including the United States, Pakistan, Iran, India, Turkey, and Russia. The sessions lasted over a week (from November 27 to December 5, 2001) at the Hotel Petersberg in Bonn, Germany. The conference adopted an agreement to create a new government for Afghanistan and the path for future political developments in the country.

On the first day, the delegates agreed on a roadmap for the process of forming a broad-based government. The accord called for the establishment of an interim

administration upon the official transfer of power on December 22, 2001. It would run the country for the next six months until an emergency *Loya Jirga* was convened to pick a transitional administration that would then lead the country until a fully representative government could be elected through free and fair elections. Elections would be held not later than two years from the date of the convening of the emergency *Loya Jirga*. It was also stipulated that within 18 months of the establishment of the Transitional Authority, a constitutional *Loya Jirga* would be called to adopt a new constitution for Afghanistan. The constitution of 1964, after certain omissions and adjustments to meet existing conditions, was accepted as applicable as an interim law until the adoption of a new constitution.[68]

But this was the easy part. There were several difficult questions to be resolved before a final agreement on the structure of the government could be achieved. After a few days the talks stalled when the Northern Alliance leader Rabbani refused to allow his delegation to proceed with the technicalities and submit names of candidates for posts in the interim administration. He publicly called for holding direct elections in Afghanistan to choose the interim administration rather than abiding by the decisions made in Bonn. He suggested that the Northern Alliance delegation return to Kabul for further discussion. From a sliver of territory in northeast Afghanistan, where his forces were cornered by the Taliban, Rabbani was catapulted into power in Kabul, again through the decisive US-led international military effort. He was wary to hand over this post that he had so easily reclaimed. As the Bonn meeting was faced with the danger of failure, international pressure built up to save the process for which there were hardly any viable substitutes. At a press conference in Bonn, James Dobbins warned that if the Bonn Conference failed, there should be no doubt that Rabbani was the obstacle. It took several strong messages from the international community to Kabul

to ease the tension. The messages included a stern warning from the Russian government to the Northern Alliance that if it refused to accept the agreement package worked out in Bonn, it would receive no further Russian aid. By the following morning Rabbani instructed his delegation to go ahead with the process in Bonn and submit the list of its candidates.

Even after the Northern Alliance delegation returned to the talks, negotiations on the structure of the new government were strongly influenced by the military situation on the ground. Having control of major cities in Afghanistan, the Northern Alliance showed little flexibility in sharing power equally with other groups. The head of its delegation, Yunus Qanuni, acting on instructions from Kabul, insisted not only that the three key ministries (defense, foreign affairs, and interior) should go to the Northern Alliance but also that the Alliance should hold three-fourths of the total cabinet seats. Claiming credit for waging war with the Taliban for years, Qanuni considered the deal fair and appropriate. Such claims were unacceptable to other groups. As the talks were headed to another impasse, the Iranian envoy, Javad Zarif, took Qanuni to a corner of the room and briefly whispered to him. When Qanuni returned to the talks, he gave up two more seats in the cabinet to be filled by others.[69] Meanwhile, three more ministries were added to the cabinet to offer more seats to the other groups. Thus, the Northern Alliance was given 16 out of 29 seats.

The selection of the leader of the interim administration became a hotly debated issue. One potential candidate was former king Zahir Shah, who commanded wide popularity among Afghans of different ethnicities and was considered a unifying figure. However, his leadership was opposed by Rabbani and other members of the Northern Alliance. Some key regional actors also showed reservation about the elderly king’s leading role under the highly demanding conditions Afghanistan was faced with. But no one was

against the king playing a symbolic and unifying role. Further, Zahir Shah himself showed no personal ambition for the top position but was interested in promoting national reconciliation.[70] After a marathon of consultations, lobbying, and talks with several contenders who had thrown their hat into the ring, the list was narrowed down to two candidates, both technically part of the Rome group: Hamid Karzai and Abdul Sattar Sirat, a respected scholar of Islamic law and a former minister of justice under the monarchy some 30 years back. Although the Rome group was accorded the privilege of nominating the head of the interim administration, its choice had to be acceptable to all other Afghan groups. Not many outside the Rome group were excited about Sirat. Even some of his comrades within the group silently marketed themselves as more qualified for the job. Feeling that Sirat's selection might cause hard-to-tackle political and administrative problems, the UN envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, informed Sirat in a private meeting that his nomination could not succeed.[71] Sirat received similar readings of the situation from other international quarters before he was finally persuaded to withdraw his candidacy. The conference then unanimously picked Hamid Karzai as the head of the interim administration.

The final agreement was signed on December 5, 2001, by all participating Afghan groups and witnessed for the United Nations by Lakhdar Brahimi, special representative of the secretary general for Afghanistan. The agreement also requested that the UN Security Council authorize the early deployment of a UN-mandated force to Afghanistan to assist in the maintenance of security for Kabul and its surrounding areas. The Security Council approved the request on December 20 and authorized the deployment of a security assistance force numbering between 3,000 and 5,000 troops. The United Kingdom agreed to supply 1,500 troops and lead the force, which became known as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The first British elements of the

forces arrived at Bagram Air Base the next day, in time to assist in providing security for the transfer of power from Rabbani and the inauguration of Karzai in Kabul on December 22, 2001.

The Battle of Shahikot—Operation Anaconda

While the Afghan interim administration began to deal with the enormous challenges of state building, governance, security, and economic revival, the US Special Forces along with those of the allies continued searching and eliminating pockets of enemy forces in remote areas. By the end of December 2001, some two dozen Special Forces' groups dotted the Afghan space from Herat to Nangrahar and from Mazar-i-Sharif to Kandahar.[72] Meanwhile, the US-led coalition forces began to build up the conventional forces needed for the postconflict stabilization effort. In the next few months, the number of coalition troops exceeded 10,000, as it was envisaged in General Tommy Franks's plan. They established their main bases at Bagram and at Kandahar airport. Other outposts were deployed in the eastern provinces to hunt down Taliban and al-Qaeda fugitives. After the disintegration of their main forces, thousands of Taliban fighters snuck across the border into the tribal areas of Pakistan, and many others simply melted into the Afghan villages. At the same time, the hardline Taliban and their al-Qaeda partners regrouped to form small pockets of resistance in difficult mountainous terrain, from where they planned to launch guerrilla attacks on foreign forces and Afghan targets.

The Special Forces' elements including the newly arrived Task Force K-BAR—a US-led special operation forces from eight nations[73]—conducted a series of raids and reconnaissance missions on suspected al-Qaeda locations and detained a significant number of real or presumed "enemy combatants" at the Zhawar cave complex in Khost,

at Deh-Rawood in Urozgan, and at Alikhel in Paktia. At the same time, the focus of US intelligence shifted toward the southeastern provinces of Paktia, Khost, and Paktika, particularly the Gardez-Khost-Orgun triangle that straddles the three provinces' borders. The area was under the strong influence of a powerful former Mujahedin commander, Jalaluddin Haqani, who later joined the Taliban and al-Qaeda militants. The presence of a large number of Taliban and al-Qaeda fugitives in the area was another reason for the attention to the region. The militants, who fled from the Tora Bora battle and from other fallen bastions of the Taliban power, were hidden in the area either to regroup or to wait for opportunities to leave for safer areas. The US Special Forces began to organize and train contingents of local tribal militia to fight isolated pockets of the militants in the mountain strongholds. In February a major concentration of enemy forces was detected in the Shahikot Valley in Paktia Province.

Shahikot (which means "royal fortress") is a five-kilometer-wide and 10-kilometer-long valley some 35 kilometers south of Gardez. It runs north to south within rugged hills. Much of the valley is about 8,000 feet in elevation, with the surrounding peaks exceeding 12,000 feet. There are two main approaches to the valley, one from the northwest and the other from the southeast, around a major ridgeline just to the west of the valley known as Tergul Ghar, which US troops nicknamed the "whale." Just outside and to the northwest of the valley is a smaller ridgeline called little Tergul Ghar, nicknamed the "little whale." These two major terrain features dominated the two approaches to the valley. Three villages named Shirkhan-Khel, Babul-Khel, and Marzak dot the valley. The southern end of the valley features a mountain peak called Takur Ghar (Takur Mountain in Pashto) with excellent observation over both the valley and a number of the exit routes.

The Shahikot base was previously used by the Mujahedin under the command of Mawlawi Nasrullah Mansur, a native of the area who later joined the fundamentalist Islamist camp, establishing close ties with foreign militant groups, including al-Qaeda. The Shahikot stronghold was well protected by natural barriers and had easy access to Gardez in the north, Khost in the east, the Orgun-Gomal Valley to the southeast, and Ghazni in the northwest. After the death of Mawlawi Mansur in 1993, his young son Saif-ur-Rahman Mansur took over the base, and after joining the Taliban he made the Shahikot base one of the major Taliban strongholds in the east. The base was a maze of fortifications, caves, and entrenchments prepared at key terrain points that dominated the Shahikot Valley. After the fall of the Taliban, Saif-ur-Rahman returned to Shahikot and reconstructed his militia, which numbered around 1,000 fighters. There he also accommodated a large number of al-Qaeda fugitives.

Armed with light and heavy weapons, the Taliban and al-Qaeda had entrenched 12.7 mm and 14.5 mm heavy machine guns, 82 mm and 120 mm mortars, 76 mm guns, and 122 mm howitzers in the caves and bunkers on the hillsides at altitudes above 3,000 feet. The militants also were armed with numerous RPG-7 grenade launchers, an effective close-quarter weapon. Expecting coalition attacks, the Taliban had established security and early warning posts on the approaches to the base and mined the access routes. The exact number of combatants in the base was unknown. Some *Jihadist* accounts put the size of the force at 440 fighters, which included 190 Uzbeks, 75 Arabs, and 175 Afghan Taliban under one Mawlawi Zahid (probably his *nom de guerre*).[74] Lester Grau estimates the total number at nearly 700 at minimum, which were reinforced later.[75] This is close to Colonel Mulholland's estimate of 600 to 700.[76]

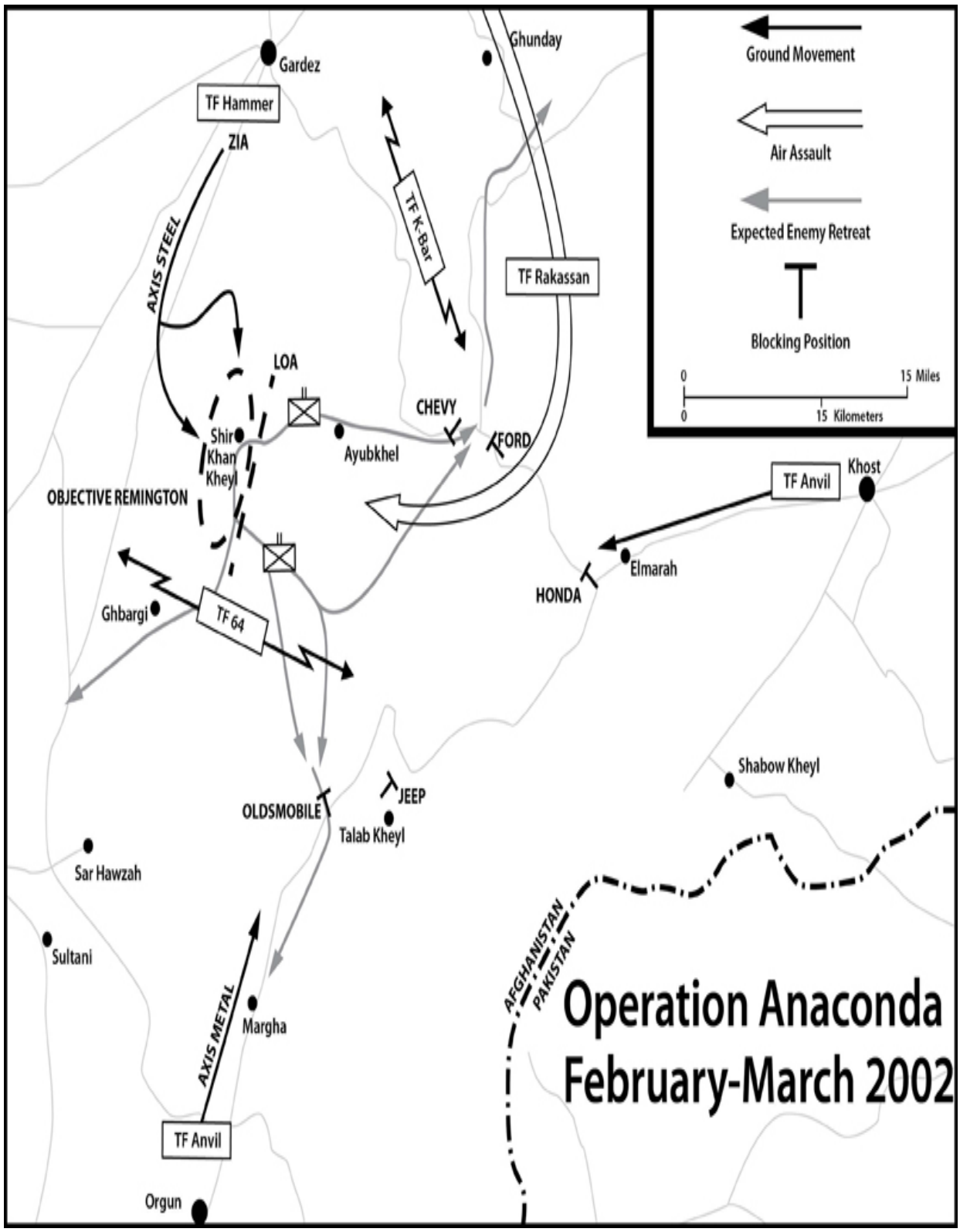
During January and February of 2002, the Taliban and al-Qaeda commanders hired laborers from the nearby Zurmat

district to improve the existing caves and fortifications in Shahikot and dig new caves and bunkers at key points.[77] The work, which continued for weeks, was a clear indication of the insurgents' intention to stay there for long and possibly use it as a base for their future insurgency operations. Moreover, there was a lot of movement around the valley as people were going in and coming out of the mountainous haven. As of mid-February, when the coalition and Afghan government militia forces considered the enemy concentration in the valley a major threat, they planned a combined offensive operation against the valley, code-named Operation Anaconda.

In order to break the enemy defenses with a much stronger grouping of force, a total of six Special Forces' teams of 12 men each, three Special Force command and control elements, three allied Special Operations task forces, and a US infantry brigade of three battalions, along with nearly 1,000 Afghan militia forces, trained by the Special Forces, were assembled by mid-February to conduct an offensive operation. The Afghan components included a few hundred militiamen under a Northern Alliance Tajik commander, Ziauddin of Gardez, and a Pashtun former junior army officer, Atiqullah Lodin of Logar. Further, several hundred other tribal militiamen under Zakim Khan of Orgun and Kamal Khan Zadran from Khost were trained and supplied by the US Special Forces. The Special Forces ran crash-training courses with the militiamen and prepared them to work effectively with the US troops as, in the words of Colonel Mulholland, "hands and glove."[78]

Operation Anaconda was basically a cordon-and-destroy operation planned and conducted by a combination of coalition and Afghan forces, including elements of the US 101st Airborne Division, the 10th Mountain Division, Special Operations Forces, and allied forces from seven nations, numbering about 2,000 soldiers. Nearly half were Afghan government militiamen based in Gardez and those sent from

Kabul in the course of the operation. The other half consisted of approximately 800 to 900 US conventional and Special Operating Forces and 200 Special Operating Forces from allied nations.[79] The 10th Mountain Division headed the Coalition Joint Task Forces (CJTF) under the division commander, Major General Hagenbeck.[80]



Operation Anaconda, February–March 2002.

The concept of the operation was a classic “hammer-and-anvil” maneuver that aimed at isolating the enemy stronghold within a wide circle while attacking it from one side (the hammer) to push the enemy forces against blocking positions established on the other side of the valley (the anvil). The concept was planned on the assumption that a smaller number of enemy fighters were defending the valley, while the capability of the Afghan militia was overestimated. According to the operation plan, a task force of some 300 Afghan and US soldiers in Gardez, code-named Hammer, would attack from the northwest through the main access route to the valley to clear the main concentration of the enemy forces in western Shahikot around several villages, forcing them to retreat east into seven blocking positions of the Task Force Rakassan made up of the air-landed elements of the US 10th Mountain and 101st Airborne Divisions in the southeastern ridges of the valley. Meanwhile, two Afghan militia columns, code-named Task Force Anvil, were to set up six outer blocking positions to cover the main exfiltration routes out of the valley. One of these columns, of some 300 men under Kamal Khan Zadran, was to move from Khost, 35 kilometers to the east, and the other, of over 200 men under Zakim Khan, had to approach from Orgun, about 50 kilometers to the southeast.

The conventional forces on the two axes were augmented by small Special Forces’ teams provided by US and coalition forces, including US Navy SEALs, US Army Special Forces, and US Air Force Special Teams. The plan was to insert these teams in key locations, where they were to establish observation posts to provide information on the enemy and to direct airstrikes on enemy targets and finally to block the enemy escape. Among them, the Australian Special Forces’ team (TF 64) was covering the southern flank while the American Special Forces’ team (TF K-Bar) covered the northern flank.

Task Force Anvil moved and deployed on the outer blocking positions with no opposition one day before the offensive. As early as 11 days before the offensive, some Special Operations' reconnaissance assets had infiltrated into surveillance positions located five to seven kilometers from the objective area, where they could observe enemy movement and call for close air support against discovered enemy targets. On February 27 Australian Task Force 64 moved to the Gardez area from Bagram and began to infiltrate into reconnaissance positions to the south of the valley. Then, on March 2, elements of the 10th Mountain and 101st Airborne divisions (TF Rakassan) would air-assault into an inner ring of seven blocking positions along the eastern side of the valley. Simultaneously Task Force Hammer was to advance from Gardez and attack the enemy forces in Shahikot from the northwest.

The command post of the CJTF Mountain was set up at Bagram on February 21. Concurrently, US logistics services began to build up the necessary supplies, especially fuel for the helicopters, to support the operation. Given the terrain and enemy conditions, the offensive was well planned, maximizing the use of available means in a coordinated way. However, due to the lack of accurate information about the enemy's strength and his defensive layout and fire system, the implementation ran into mishaps right from the beginning. The combat action during the first two days (March 2–4) was seriously interrupted by malfunctions, surprises, and unexpected enemy action.

On D-day, March 2, 300 men of Task Force Hammer, supported by the Special Forces, departed Gardez at midnight and approached the northwestern access of the valley in the dark. Its advance was interrupted at several points due to trucks getting stuck in the mud and breakdowns as the column approached its designated phase line. About 260 of the Afghans were to attack around the southern end of the "whale" and into the valley as the main

effort, while a secondary effort by 40 militiamen and Special Forces' soldiers would set up a blocking position near the "little whale" at the northern entrance to the valley. When the troops reached their attack positions on foot around 6:30 AM, contrary to expectations, only a handful of air strikes hit enemy positions on the "whale," and these without slowing down the enemy's mortar and artillery fire. Despite its designation as the main attack, Task Force Hammer received only one additional close air support and one Apache fire support mission throughout that cold day of March. Because of ongoing combat elsewhere, air support consistently failed to arrive throughout the day. The situation demoralized the militiamen as they came under withering enemy fire, forcing them to fall back. Seeing further advance as not possible, the column decided to break contact by nightfall and return to Gardez and make another attempt the following day.

While the task force on the west was struggling to deal with a difficult situation, to the east the blocking task force (Rakassan) failed to air-land all its men simultaneously on landing zones near the blocking positions. Following a preassault air bombing of the enemy targets, Apache helicopters made runs down the valley and engaged disclosed enemy positions. Then the first of two planned lifts of seven helicopters (Chinook) flew from Bagram and dropped off infantrymen at their seven designated landing zones. The landed teams came under heavy enemy fire immediately as they struggled up a rocky surface to move from landing zones to their designated blocking positions. Although they occupied five of seven assigned blocking positions by noon, a sudden change in weather delayed the arrival of the second lift of troops until the next day. The half-strength blocking positions were pinned down by constant mortar fire from well-positioned enemy forces on the heights. On the left flank, the 10th Mountain Division elements, assigned to two extreme left blocking positions, not only failed to occupy their designated positions but had to fall

back. The “Hammer” did not hammer the enemy to fall back, nor did the “Anvil” hold a solid line to block him.

During the day and into the night, the American troops struggled with the difficult task of repelling repeated enemy attempts to outflank their line on the left until the fighting slowed down at night. The number of casualties was rising. By the end of the day some 25 soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division were wounded, four very seriously. Taking advantage of the dark hours and using their night-vision goggles, the troops were able to improve their situation on the battlefield. Since much of the enemy fire on the left was coming from the village of Marzak, which was strongly held by the enemy fighters, the next day air strikes were directed onto the village, which was virtually turned into rubble by a series of bombing runs.

On the following morning (March 3), with the landing of the second lift of troops assigned to Task Force Rakassan, the line was reinforced, and the situation in the valley began to stabilize. But it was obvious that the initial plan was not working and that it needed to be modified. In the following days a number of changes were made in the original concept, some with catastrophic consequences. One of them happened early on March 4 on Takur Ghar, the highest peak at the end of the valley to the south. Late on March 2, the US command saw the need to insert forces into two observation posts on Takur Ghar to provide further surveillance, particularly over the stalling left flank of Task Force Rakassan, and to direct air strikes on the numerous concentrations of enemy forces.

Accordingly, early on March 4, two Chinook helicopters left Gardez to drop two teams on the high ground, one in the north and the other in the south on Takur Ghar. As the second chopper (Razor 3), carrying a team of Navy SEALs, approached the landing zone at about 3:00 AM right on the top of the mountain, it found the peak strongly held by enemy fighters. Before making a decision to abort the

mission, the chopper was hit on the side by an RPG-7 rocket while machine gun bullets ripped through the fuselage. When the heavily damaged helicopter tried to fly away, one of the team members, Petty Officer Neil Roberts, was standing at the ramp and fell out of the helicopter some five to 10 feet onto the snowy mountaintop and was left out there. The chopper made a crash landing seven kilometers to the north. An AC-130 gunship was on site at the location and was called on to help. The gunship's sensors saw Roberts already surrounded by several enemy fighters, who were too close to Roberts to employ an airstrike. Roberts's bullet-ridden body was later found at a distance from his original location by the follow-up teams. The second Chinook helicopter (Razor 4), which had inserted its reconnaissance team in the north, arrived on the helicopter crash scene and picked up the downed crewmen and the SEALs and flew them to Gardez.

In order to save Roberts, assuming he still had a chance, his SEAL teammates were then flown back in Razor 4 to Roberts's last-known location on Takur Ghar. In spite of enemy fire, the six-man team was inserted around 5:00 AM and soon was engaged in heavy fighting with the enemy, losing one man with two members wounded. Under strong enemy pressure, the team called in an air strike, which they used as cover to withdraw northeast off the mountain peak to a safer position 1,000 feet below.

A quick-reaction, platoon-sized Ranger unit was the next team to be called on to move to the hotspot on Takur Ghar to rescue those surviving on the snowy mount. The first lift of 10 Rangers (Razor 1) and the second lift of an equal number of Rangers (Razor 2) approached the mountain about 5:45 AM. The first Chinook was seriously hit by an RPG round and machine gun fire, which caused it to drop 10 feet and land on the snowy slope of the mountain. With one man killed, the rest exited the damaged chopper and moved against the enemy positions, while US aircraft kept the militants' lines

under bombardment and strafing. A little over one hour later, the Rangers dominated the line. The Rangers on the second lift had landed 800 feet below and had to walk up the stiff mountain ridge. Once they joined the first group, the Rangers launched a coordinated attack on the enemy bunkers, and by late afternoon they dominated the peak and consolidated their position. There they waited all day for the night evacuation. At 8:15 PM, the Rangers and the SEALS, along with their dead and wounded, were evacuated in four helicopters. The fight on Takur Ghar was the most deadly firefight during Operation Anaconda, resulting in seven dead, including four army, two air force, and one navy servicemen.

Elsewhere on the ground, General Hagenbeck modified his plan, instructing one infantry battalion to attack toward the heights of the ridge to the east of the valley and begin to clear the ridge of the enemy systematically. On its right flank, another infantry battalion was tasked to air-assault into the northernmost landing zone with the mission of leapfrogging, north to south, and clearing the ridgeline between successive positions. Beginning the attack in the early hours of March 4, the advancing infantry linked up by the end of the day with those US elements still in place from the air assault of March 2.

Over the next few days, elements of Task Force Rakassan continued to move slowly down the ridgeline from an area to the east of the original blocking positions, clearing all the caves and potential enemy positions along the way. The al-Qaeda fighters that the American infantry encountered along the way skillfully used the terrain to mask their positions and movement and employed mortars effectively but could never muster a coordinated attack of any great size. They tried to reinforce their forces in the valley, but to no avail. As Task Force Rakassan soldiers fought down the eastern ridge, they killed numerous al-Qaeda, cleared over 129 caves and 40 buildings, and destroyed 22 heavy weapons emplacements. In order to reinforce the Afghan government militia, a mixed

contingent force of some 700 infantry, tanks, and armored vehicles under Commander Gul Haidar was dispatched from Kabul. It was committed on March 10 at the northern entrance to the valley. In the following days, the combined actions of the coalition and Afghan forces cleared the village of Marzak. The three other villages were quickly taken, as the enemy had already fled; only two wounded prisoners were captured.

Operation Anaconda ended on March 19 after the Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters were killed or fled the area. A unit of Afghan militia stayed there to clear any remaining pockets of resistance. The following month, Afghan militia and US Special Forces checked the area again and found more.

The Bumpy Road to Peace

The transfer of power on December 22, 2001, to the Afghanistan Interim Administration (AIA) was smooth and jubilant, but its path to take control of a unified country was bumpy and challenging. The UN-sponsored political process, aimed at unifying Afghanistan under a legitimate central government, was marred by factional competition for power. Although Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun leader from the Rome group, was selected to head the AIA, the governing administration was dominated by the Panjsheri faction of the Northern Alliance, which controlled the military, foreign affairs, police, and intelligence. In the meantime, local powerbrokers and warlords who had seized control of the provinces maintained their own private armies, sources of income, foreign linkages, and autonomous administrations. The situation deepened factional distrust, stemming from the ethnic division over the last two decades, and fueled widespread public discontent, particularly among the Pashtuns—the largest single ethnic group in Afghanistan.

It was hoped that the emergency *Loya Jirga* in June 2002 would broaden the base of the government, assert civilian leadership, promote the democratic process, and take authority away from the nonstate patronage networks. Although the *Jirga* came up with a clear winner (Hamid Karzai) through secret balloting, it failed to bring meaningful changes in the government structure, which was still dominated by Northern Alliance Tajiks.

Another issue that disappointed the supporters of the former king Zahir Shah was his perceived exclusion from being considered as a candidate for the top post. Months before the *Loya Jirga*, it was widely believed that the former king was interested in assuming the symbolic position of the head of state in the transitional government. During my meeting with the king in Rome in February 2002, his close family members at least gave me the impression that his majesty was eying the top position.[81] But during the emergency *Loya Jirga*, the former monarch publicly declined his candidacy for any official position. Still, his supporters believed that his ouster was engineered by heavy-handed American and UN maneuvering as a result of the strong opposition of the Northern Alliance to the leadership of Zahir Shah.[82] In fact, the frail octogenarian king had little interest in assuming an official post other than the honorary title of the "Father of the Nation." His family, however, was pushing for his candidacy against the will of the former king.[83]

In the absence of an effective central security establishment, the transitional administration depended on the military muscle of factional militias. The Bonn agreement stipulated that "upon the official transfer of power, all Mujahidin, Afghan armed forces and armed groups in the country shall come under the command and control of the Interim Authority, and be reorganized according to the requirements of the new Afghan security and armed forces." However, before these rival factional militias could be

“reorganized,” they were technically integrated into the government system, but they responded only to their faction leaders and often fought turf battles against one another at the expense of public security. While the US-led coalition forces, which numbered about 9,000 US soldiers plus a few thousand allied troops by the end of 2002, were engaged in military action against al-Qaeda and Taliban pockets, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was deployed only in Kabul. Repeated requests by the Afghan authorities, the United Nations, and international human rights organizations to expand the ISAF to other major Afghan cities were denied by the Americans or not answered. They saw building the Afghan National Army (ANA) and security forces to police the war-devastated country as an alternative to expanding the ISAF. Helping Afghanistan create its own military and police was a top priority of the international community, but the magnitude of the challenge had been underestimated. While the fragile transitional administration needed immediate security to stabilize the country and rebuild the economy, the project of rebuilding the national military and police was a relatively long-term undertaking.

Security Sector Reform (SSR) was the flagship of the Bonn process for rebuilding Afghanistan’s security forces and law enforcement. Formally established in April 2002 at a security donors conference in Geneva, Switzerland, the reform program consisted of five pillars, each supported by a different donor state: military reform (the United States); police reform (Germany); the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of ex-combatants, or DDR (Japan); judicial reform (Italy); and counternarcotics (the United Kingdom). While all these pillars of reform and development were interconnected, they were pursued by different actors with varying levels of commitment, resources, priorities, and procedures. Thus it developed unevenly, hindering effective coordination. The main factors that hindered progress and affected capacity building included insufficient donor

investment, the political influence of nonstate armed groups and warlords, and insufficient reform in the ministries of defense and the interior, which were haunted by the influence of factional interest groups not committed to reform. Building the Afghan National Army with the support of the United States progressed far ahead of the police force, which was basically created as a poorly trained and inadequately equipped paramilitary force. The undersourced justice-sector reform fell far behind, while continued insecurity made every counternarcotic and DDR effort largely ineffective.

The US-led effort to build the Afghan National Army was slow and marred by problems in attracting recruits and by the lack of support from the Ministry of Defense, which was dominated by General Fahim's Panjsheri clique, which saw the ANA as a threat to its power.[84] A plan for forming the army, drafted by a government commission and released by the Ministry of Defense in October 2002, was criticized by President Karzai and his foreign backers as an attempt to perpetuate the dominance of factional militias in the ANA. The plan awarded the militiamen command over military units when they reenlist in the ANA.[85]

As the central administration's authority hardly extended beyond the capital, regional strongmen played their power games. In the next two years, clashes continued between local commanders, stemming from old rivalries or the desire to control or consolidate more territory. In the troubled provinces of Paktia and Khost, the often-violent standoff between the Kabul-appointed governors and rebel forces kept the region in the grip of instability. In the north, tension between forces loyal to General Rashid Dostum, the leader of the Junbish Mili Islami (the National Islamic Movement), and militia units controlled by the Tajik commander Atta Mohammad continued with intermittent clashes in Jawzjan, Faryab, Samangan, Balkh, and areas south of Mazar-i Sharif. In the fall of 2003, it took me, as the interior minister, two

months and a lot of effort and international support to end infighting between two supposedly Afghan Army formations —the 7th Corps under General Atta and the 8th Corps controlled by Dostum—who were fighting in Balkh Province with tanks, heavy artillery, and rockets. This fighting kept the area unstable and insecure for months and caused civilian casualties. In the west, ethnic differences and rival claims for control of the Shindand district led to recurring skirmishes between the militias loyal to the Herat strongman Ismail Khan and those supporting the local Pashtun leader Amanullah Noorzai. In an effort to rein in the country's powerful warlords, President Karzai in December 2002 issued a decree banning political leaders from taking part in military activity.[86] However, he had little power and influence to implement his decree, while the international actors were not interested in getting involved in intra-Afghan disputes and were more focused on fighting "terrorists," most of whom had migrated across the border to Pakistan and launched cross-border attacks inside Afghanistan. The violence culminated in simultaneous attacks on September 5 in Kandahar and Kabul. President Hamid Karzai narrowly escaped an assassination attempt in his hometown of Kandahar. The same day, a powerful car bomb exploded in a crowded street in downtown Kabul, killing at least 25 people and injuring scores more.[87]

The lack of security encouraged increased poppy cultivation in many provinces, making Afghanistan, once again, the top opium producer in the world[88]—a trend that has never reversed except for some slight annual declines. Poor security conditions also took a heavy toll on human rights across the country. Targeted violence and looting by ethnic militias uprooted Pashtun communities across northern Afghanistan, where Pashtuns are a minority in the Tajik- and Uzbek-dominated areas.[89] The violence forced more than 100,000 Pashtuns to leave their homes and

livelihood and become refugees in the south. Further, the security vacuum in the north led to a rise in attacks on humanitarian aid workers and Afghan civilians. In the south, the instability created by the collapse of the Taliban brought competing warlords to power, who were involved in intimidation, violence, and the creation of general insecurity.[90]

The reconstruction of Afghanistan's war-ravaged and drought-stricken economy has been considered the key to peace and stability in the country. Rebuilding Afghanistan has also been intertwined with the strategy of the war on terrorism. Differing approaches to the country's economic reconstruction placed the foundation of long-term economic recovery on shaky ground. This had a lasting effect. Many government leaders favored a centrally controlled, macroeconomic approach to building the nation's economic infrastructure that would help expand the central government's authority and provide substantial employment opportunities. Roads, energy, and water were considered three main elements of economic recovery, particularly in the agriculture, industry, and service sectors. On the other hand, international and domestic proponents of grass-roots development promoted a microenterprise approach to building community-based businesses and infrastructure, which proved to be unsustainable when the security situation deteriorated in the coming years. In spite of the shortage of institutional capacity in the government, without the state holding a central role, public goods contributed by different actors tended to be uncoordinated, unstable, transient, and more supply-driven than demand-driven. The situation perpetuated and compounded the crisis as local quick-impact projects failed over time because of security problems and a lack of central supervision.

In the coming years, the roadmap chartered in Bonn achieved its political procedural benchmarks but not the institutional capacity to sustain the reform and progress

toward a democratic system. A new liberal and progressive constitution was adopted by a *Loya Jirga* in January 2004; the first presidential election was successfully held in October 2004, making President Karzai the first democratically elected national leader in Afghanistan history. The following year, a parliamentary election in September 2005 established a bicameral parliament where at least 25 percent of MPs were women. The judiciary branch and the Supreme Court finally were stood up. The process represented democracy more in name than in substance. Due to the slow development of security institutions, the failure to disarm illegal armed groups, and the absence of the rule of law, the election became a means of legitimizing many human rights violators, militia leaders, and power abusers.

The parliamentary election in Afghanistan was the final event of the internationally sponsored Bonn accords of December 2001 and the political arrangements linked to Operation Enduring Freedom. Although Afghanistan met all the deadlines of the Bonn Accords, it did not realize the treaty's ultimate goal of ending the conflict and establishing peace and stability. The roadblocks included the extent of war damage and the lack of sufficient investment in developing state institutions and the economy. The progress was dramatic but fragile and hardly sustainable. From the outset, two contradictory concepts drove international intervention in Afghanistan. The country was described as the major front of a global war on terror, yet the intervention was a "light footprint" engagement. This "light footprint" continued to impair every aspect of reconstruction in Afghanistan. The Taliban were removed from power, but neither their potential to come back nor their external support was addressed. Alliances of convenience with warlords perpetuated the influence of the most notorious human rights violators. The inefficient use of insufficient funds, mostly by international contractors outside

government control, failed to create economic opportunities, good governance, and the rule of law.

For the next nine years following the end of the Bonn process, as discussed in the next chapter, Afghanistan traveled along a path of no peace and no war that hindered progress toward stability but gradually brought major political, institutional, security, social, demographic, and economic transformation that created a critical mass in support of peaceful competition for power instead of fighting a civil war.

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13 Conclusion

No foreign military invasion has ever been tolerated by the people living in today's Afghanistan; throughout the turbulent history of the land, all have been fiercely resisted. The US-led military intervention in 2001 came as an exception and was overwhelmingly welcomed and received with open arms. The invasion that removed the totalitarian regime of the Taliban, forced the al-Qaeda terrorist network out of Afghanistan, and contained the growing intervention of competing neighbors, particularly Pakistan, was seen as a rescue operation rather than an armed aggression. The Afghan population had suffered from decades of infighting, violence, displacement, and intrigue by their neighbors. The country had become isolated, devastated, brutalized, and faced political, social, and economic degradation. Having lost confidence in power-thirsty internal warring factions and regional actors, the war-weary citizens were desperate to see the United States intervene in the situation.

The US intervention, however, came as an accident. Had the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States not happened, the US military move against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan would be hardly imaginable. Further, it was a unique invasion. In contrast to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, which aimed to prop up an unpopular Communist regime, the US-led invasion came to overthrow

an unpopular extremist government and its foreign militant supporters. Besides, the US operation was tacitly endorsed by the United Nations,[1] and was launched with a minimum of American and allied ground troops, helping the Afghans to free their country from a regime that allowed foreign extremists to hijack their country. Furthermore, the US intervention was supported by the Afghans, who hoped it might result in much needed international security and financial aid. Paradoxically, a foreign invasion became the hope for sovereignty, peace, and freedom in Afghanistan.

The euphoria, however, did not last long, as the foreign aid failed to live up to the peoples' expectations in spite of some major changes in the country. During the first four years under the Bonn process, Afghanistan made major strides in its political transition to democracy and rebuilding state institutions. The government's legitimacy was supported by the political participation of all domestic stakeholders in adopting the constitution; by holding relatively fair and free presidential and legislative elections while creating a national army and a national police force, dismantling major factional militia units; by building a national economy from ground zero; by expanding and improving the formal education system and public health services; and by improving the status and future of Afghan women. The progress was real but fragile.

In the following years four factors contributed to a security downturn in Afghanistan:

- nation building on the cheap;
- tactics without strategy;
- a failure to integrate domestic authority structures;
- competing regional actors.

For the United States and its international partners, the main purpose for which they went to war was achieved in less than three months—the al-Qaeda network was

disrupted and the Taliban regime was overthrown. It was an accidental short war for the allies but became a long process to their responsible exit—a process that would take another decade and may take longer. The challenge was how to prevent Afghanistan from again becoming a source of terrorist threats to the United States and its allies in the West. The notional response was to assist Afghanistan in stabilizing itself and to help other regional powers to stem the menace of transnational terrorism and violent extremism. This required a long-term strategy of nation building that the Bush administration did not favor ideologically. When George W. Bush ran for president, he dismissed "nation building," but in April 2002 he announced that the United States would lead an international effort to rebuild Afghanistan on the model of the Marshall Plan for Europe after World War II.[2] Nevertheless, sufficient resources were not committed coherently to implement this ambitious project. By December 31, 2015, the United States alone had appropriated approximately $113 billion for Afghanistan,[3] which surpassed the $103.4 billon cost of the Marshal Plan (1948–1952);[4] but the US aid in Afghanistan came incrementally with no clear strategy. A great chunk of the aid never left the donor country. The aid was largely militarized, as nearly 60 percent was spent on building and sustaining the Afghan army and police. Furthermore, most of the monetary assistance in support of counterterrorism efforts empowered nonstate power holders and warlords who were only interested in building up their patronage networks at the expense of developing legitimate state institutions. What further minimized the impact of the aid was the allocation of more than 90 percent of it outside the government's budget and institutions. A large amount of American aid was spent by international contractors who charged outrageous overhead costs throughout multiple levels of subcontracts. This increased the cost of rebuilding

Afghanistan enormously. What actually reached the intended recipients was often not more than 15 percent of the allocated funds. An official of the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reported in January 2012 that the NGO's overhead was rarely kept under 70 percent, leaving only 30 percent of the aid for development, only half of which reached the intended recipients. The remainder, he stated, was "lost, stolen or misappropriated by Afghan workers and officials."[5]

Thus, from the outset, the planning was flawed, the reconstruction goals were too ambitious, and the resources dreadfully limited. An underresourced and inconsistent state-building drive amid a rising insurgency failed to match the real challenges and realities on the ground. The situation dashed the high hopes of the Afghans, whose expectations were not managed by the donor community.

The US-led coalition in Afghanistan comprised numerous countries that came to Afghanistan with uneven levels of commitment, varying degrees of resources, and differing procedures and priorities without a shared vision and a clearly defined strategy. Consequently, the domestic and foreign actors scrambled to respond tactically and in piecemeal fashion to the emerging challenges, at the expense of long-term priorities. The absence of a shared vision and strategy blurred the distinction between means and ends. Means too often defined goals, tactics too often drove strategy, supply too often determined demands, and short-term necessities too often took precedence over long-term priorities. This also led many to question whether the US-led operation was aimed at securing Afghanistan, reshaping the whole of South Asia, or simply setting the conditions for a responsible exit plan. An American warrior of the Vietnam War famously once said that America had not been fighting the war in Vietnam for 12 years, but for one year 12 times.[6] The same can be said in Afghanistan,

where the international forces inconsistently fought many one-year wars.

In Afghanistan, political leaders missed emerging opportunities and failed to rise above factional and ethnic rivalries in the interest of building national institutions, upholding the rule of law, and stabilizing the country through democratic solutions. Despite significant progress in state building and steady economic growth, the politicization of donors' aid and the donors' alliance with abusive power brokers and warlords in the war against terrorists and insurgents undermined the development of effective state institutions and the rule of law. As in other similar cases in conflict areas, donors and aiding agencies found it more convenient and easy to implement their aid programs through connecting with Afghan power holders on the ground, bypassing the nascent state institutions. The absence of the centrality of the state to coordinate the effort led to the reinforcement of patronage networks and warlordism that undermined the legitimate authority for years.

Consequently, the government lacked credible institutional and political muscle to offset the influence of local power brokers. The situation promoted corruption, which permeated not only governance but also the political and economic sectors and became a major hurdle in achieving security and development. The ability of the government to deliver services and exert influence throughout the country began to erode its authority.

In spite of the Good Neighborly Relations' Declaration of December 24, 2002, signed by all Afghanistan's neighbors, reaffirming "their commitment to constructive and supportive bilateral relationships based on the principles of territorial integrity, mutual respect, friendly relations, co-operation and non-interference in each other's internal affairs,"[7] Pakistan missed a golden opportunity to improve

regional stability through cooperation in stabilizing Afghanistan at a time when substantial international support for regional stability and security was available. Pakistan further contributed to instability in Afghanistan by providing a safe haven for the ousted Taliban regime, supporting it as it regrouped, rearmed, and trained, and then beginning to use it as an instrument of pressure for gaining influence in Afghanistan.[8]

The first three years after the fall of the Taliban offered the best window of opportunity for reconstruction. The enemy had disintegrated, public support for the policies of the government was overwhelming, and international military forces had the hearts and minds of the population. In many cases, the people willingly cooperated in fighting the remnants of terrorist pockets. This willing popular support was squandered. The Unites States' shift in attention and resources to Iraq came at a time when the global *Jihadists* had refocused their attention on a weak Afghan state. Besides, the Afghan government failed to act for long-term stability, opting instead for short-term deals with nonstate power holders who had their own interests. The result was a weak government with incompetent security forces and a poor and corrupt justice sector. The Afghan government's failure to protect rural communities, to respond to the legitimate needs of the people, and to fight corruption rejuvenated the insurgency.

The failure to build the post-Taliban state on sound foundations troubled the process of stabilization in the following years. The Bonn process was followed by three distinct phases:

- the stabilization of Afghanistan under the Afghanistan Compact;
- the military surge and counterinsurgency campaign;
- the security transition and the exit strategy.

The Afghanistan Compact

Building on the achievements made during the Bonn process (which took place from December 2001 to September 2005), the framework for future international partnership with Afghanistan was defined in the Afghanistan Compact, which was adopted at the London International Conference, which took place from January 31 to February 1, 2006. Consistent with the goals of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), the Afghan government and its international partners made the commitment to a shared vision to "overcome the legacy of conflict in Afghanistan by setting conditions for sustainable economic growth and development; strengthening state institutions and civil society; removing remaining terrorist threats; meeting the challenge of counter-narcotics; rebuilding capacity and infrastructure; reducing poverty; and meeting basic human needs."[9] For Afghanistan to work toward the realization of the vision, the international community pledged to provide resources and support for its goals. The compact identified three pillars of activity for the next five years following the adoption of the compact. They included:

- security;
- governance, the rule of law, and human rights;
- economic and social development.

Eliminating the narcotics industry was considered a vital and cross-cutting area of effort as part of the compact.

The Afghanistan Compact was mostly focused on social-economic development, assuming that the security situation had improved. Dozens of benchmarks were set in the compact for Afghanistan to reach during the five years of the compact, although no timed targets were specified by the international partners. But the political context under which the compact was to be executed was fast changing.

Domestically, the political consensus of 2001 had been lost to disruptive factionalism. Reemerging strongmen and political opportunists linked to criminal networks had forced the weak central government into political compromises and tactical tradeoffs. The regional actors, who collectively supported the overthrow of the Taliban and political transition in Afghanistan, began to hold diverging positions in the face of the deterioration of security in Afghanistan and the resurgence of the Taliban. The perception of Afghanistan's sliding back into instability and chaos drove domestic interest groups and neighboring countries to hedge against possible turmoil.

Internationally, the coalition of nations involved in Afghanistan was divided and did not share a unified vision. Nor had the members of the coalition states provided the same level of political and military commitment. The upsurge of violence coincided with the extension of NATO's security mission to cover the whole of Afghanistan in 2006. The Taliban resurgence was also attributed to a perception that NATO's expansion signaled a reduction of the military commitment by the United States to Afghanistan. Further, the notion that NATO had signed up for peacekeeping and was weaker in fighting a full-fledged war bolstered the Taliban's resolve to intensify their attacks. In fact, NATO countries made commitments to the Afghanistan mission out of a show of solidarity with the alliance but lacked the institutional capacity for the enterprise and a way to do it.

In spite of the significant institutional, social, and economic achievements made during the previous five years, two major challenges impeded the implementation of the compact, which was also endorsed in a follow-up international conference in Paris in 2008. First, the upsurge of violence in spring 2006, which practically commenced the second Taliban war, took the Afghan leadership and its international partners by surprise. The Taliban and their

foreign supporters had thoroughly planned and made preparations for the renewed conflict, while the Afghan government and its NATO allies missed the impending threats due to overconfidence. The faux pas undercut the assumption of relative stability upon which the Afghanistan Compact was premised. The growing cross-border attacks from sanctuaries in Pakistan curbed development activities. The situation had an adverse impact on the development of legitimate state institutions, as the government and its international backers tended to favor short-sighted, quick fixes such as poorly trained militias and to work around, not through, the new democratic institutions. Exploiting the unstable environment, strongmen and political opportunists who had reasserted themselves linked up with criminal networks.

Second, the deterioration of security in Iraq kept US attention focused on Iraq, at the expense of Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, the situation had evolved from a relatively simple postconflict setting in 2002 into a complex threat environment marked by terrorism, insurgency, and the many challenges of nation building. Its ever-increasing complexity perplexed the Afghan government and contributing nations and stymied the development of any unified, long-term vision for the nation and its people. All parties approached the emerging issues in divergent, uncoordinated ways. Operations on every front were fragmented reactions to events rather than strategic undertakings designed to support long-term goals. Militarily, for instance, US troops narrowly focused on fighting terrorists in Afghanistan after the Taliban was removed from power, even though many realized that numerous terrorists had already snuck across the border into Pakistan. Other NATO members restricted their contributions in terms of manpower and resources to peacekeeping operations, despite the fact that peace had not yet been achieved. The

chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen, precisely summarized the challenges facing the international community in Afghanistan when he told the US Congress in 2007 that “in Iraq, we do what we must. . . . In Afghanistan, we do what we can.”[10] Donor fatigue was also becoming more and more visible as the war in Afghanistan dragged on. In the words of the ISAF commander General David Richards, “The international community as a whole had not approached the reconstruction and development needs of Afghanistan with the sense of urgency that could meet the people’s expectation. The Taliban had slowly exploited the resulting vacuum and this year [2006] it had reached a new pitch.”[11]

Counternarcotics

Eliminating the narcotics industry was considered a vital and cross-cutting area of effort as part of the Afghanistan Compact. Proceeds from the illicit drug trade financed terrorism and insurgency, funded illegal armed groups, empowered nonstatutory power holders, sustained criminal networks, and corrupted the government—all of which posed serious threats to the establishment of stability, good governance, and the rule of law in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has a relatively short history of massive opium production. The country produced only 100 tons of opium per year before 1978, which increased tenfold by 1992. In 2007, opium production peaked at 8,200 tons. In 2013, the estimated potential production in Afghanistan still amounted to 5,500 tons, an increase of 49 percent over its 2012 level (3,700 tons).[12] The production continued to grow in 2014 with a rise to 6,400 tons. Although 2015 saw a major drop (48 percent) in drug production (3,300 tons), the decrease was mostly caused by a reduction in opium yield per hectare. Still, 97 percent of total opium cultivation in

Afghanistan in 2015 took place in the southern, eastern and western regions of the country, which include the nation's most insecure provinces.[13]

The development of a narco-economy in the country has been mainly caused by continuing conflict. It expanded as part of the war economy during the last two decades of the twentieth century and continued to grow as a result of the war-instigated destruction of the rural economy and a long cycle of drought that impoverished farmers. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) asserted that in 1978 Afghanistan was on the verge of attaining food self-sufficiency, but that since then the country's "irrigated surfaces have been cut in half. Arable land, which before the war corresponded to only 12% of the country's total area, fell by another 37% during the 1990s."[14] Under such conditions, the farmers saw the production of opium, which is a high-value and easily marketable commodity, as the only possible way to survive in an unpredictable and dangerous environment.

Furthermore, in the absence of a viable licit economy and reliable markets, farmers saw opium as the only product that they could easily sell. Gross income from opium was $5,200 per hectare in 2007, while an equivalent crop of wheat, frequently promoted by the international community as an alternative crop, yielded roughly one-tenth the income ($545).[15] Farmers who claim they would prefer a licit income protest that they have no option but to grow opium in order to support their families. Thus, the illicit drug production and trafficking became a low-risk activity in a high-risk environment. In order to eliminate it, the situation needs to be reversed: the illicit drug trade must be made a high-risk activity in a low-risk environment. This entails the development of human security and the firm establishment of the rule of law.

Three major hurdles hampered any counternarcotics campaign in Afghanistan. They include a record production of opium, the consolidation of the drug trade into a network of politicians, drug mafia, and traffickers, and a disagreement over any counterdrug strategy by representatives of the international community. During the past 14 years, a wide range of fragmented measures to curb drug production were tested and failed. They included paying off the growers, the eradication of poppy fields and interdiction of traffickers, the experimental spraying of the crop, introducing alternative livelihoods, and crop substitution programs. These measures were implemented selectively, without a clearly designed comprehensive approach. In 2004–2005 the Bush administration's keen interest in spraying the opium poppy fields was strongly resisted by President Karzai for compelling reasons. Eradication without providing for meaningful alternative development is not sustainable while forcible eradication can be counterproductive. The reduction of poppy cultivation takes more than a forcible eradication program.

Following the failure to invest sufficiently in building state institutions and the rise of insurgency in 2006, the weak Afghan government increasingly relied on corruption-infested nonstate patronage networks. Even some US field commanders in southern Afghanistan adopted a strategy that increasingly placed the priority on fighting the Taliban, even if that meant tolerating some corruption and ignoring counternarcotic efforts. Military officials in the region had concluded that the Taliban insurgency was the most pressing threat to stability and that a sweeping effort to drive out corruption could create chaos and a governance vacuum that the Taliban could exploit.[16] Force protection was another reason for tolerating corrupt practices. The situation caused the Afghan government to suspect the sincerity and the capacity of the international community's

commitment to facing the rising threats. This inhibited the government from acting decisively, as it became dependent on warlords, drug lords, and militia commanders in the form of a *pax narcotica* and *pax belicosa*.

Given the multidimensional nature of opium production in Afghanistan, counternarcotics efforts need to be mainstreamed into all aspects of development: security, economic growth, and governance. There are no quick and simple solutions. Destroying a sizeable sector of Afghanistan's economy without undermining stability requires enormous resources, administrative capacity, and time.

Counterinsurgency Operations

The three principal means of waging counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan include

- military forces;
- cooperation from neighbors, especially Pakistan, to remove the insurgents' bases from their territory or stem their cross-border attacks;
- an effective Afghan government that protects the population, delivers services, and wins the trust and support of the population.

Military Forces

The size of security forces matters a lot in fighting a counterinsurgency campaign. The size and professional capacity of the security forces, which were intended to be built under the Security Sector Reform (SSR), were not proportioned to the requirement of their mission to fight terrorism and insurgency while providing space for state building and development.

From their inception, the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) have experienced shifting political and security conditions that have impacted their size, structure, mission, and capacity.[17]

At the end of the Bonn process (in 2005), the Afghan National Army and police could hardly field more than 60,000 poorly trained and lightly armed troops and policemen. And yet in early 2006, just months before the sudden upsurge of insurgency in the south, the Pentagon hoped, against Kabul's objections, to cut the planned end strength of the ANA to 50,000 on the grounds of Afghanistan's inability to pay for a larger army, citing "current intelligence" about the size of the Taliban and other potential threats.[18] Further, the presumption of an open-ended presence of international forces in Afghanistan with the expectation of no strong-armed opposition tempered the urgency and pace of building indigenous security forces in the country. The situation led to the chronic dependency of the ANDSF on international forces for enablers, including aviation, intelligence, and logistics, which continues to haunt the post-ISAF ability of the ANDSF.

In 2002–2003, the number of US troops in Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom was 10,000 to 12,000, which was increased to about 16,000 in 2004. In 2005, 4,000 more troops were added. Thus, the Afghanistan Compact adopted in 2006 was not backed up by adequate military force at the time that the Taliban-led insurgency intensified. In 2008, the number of US troops in Afghanistan increased substantially. The ISAF commander, David McKiernan, who took over in June 2008, requested 30,000 more troops to blunt the Taliban insurgency. Before the end of the Bush administration, 17,000 more troops were authorized for deployment into Afghanistan, but they were not deployed until February 2009.

From August 2003, when NATO assumed leadership of ISAF operations, through 2006, when the ISAF mandate expanded to cover all of Afghanistan, 25 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) created what was often referred to as “the ISAF effect without ISAF.” The PRTs, which were first introduced in 2002 by the US forces, consisted of military personnel, diplomats, and reconstruction experts tasked to support the expansion of the government authority and facilitate security and reconstruction efforts. With the expansion of the Alliance’s area of operations, the revised operational plan paved the way for a greater ISAF role in waging military operations. By 2007, the US-led coalition and ISAF were unified in a single ISAF command, which controlled all NATO forces in Afghanistan through six regional commands, including the Kabul, southern, southwestern, western, northern, and eastern regional commands. Depending on the conditions imposed by the troop-donating nations, PRTs operated in different ways. There were PRTs with adequate resources and the will to fulfill their mandate. Such bodies contributed significantly to the stability operations in Afghanistan. There were others that merely added a flag to ISAF and lacked the capacity to make a difference.

Since insurgents enjoy the freedom of action to hit fixed targets at the time and place of their choosing, adequate military and police forces are often unavailable to secure the whole territory at the same time. One of the well-tested counterinsurgency tactics is the so-called “widening inkspot” approach, which involves clearing, holding, and building population centers and expanding them to cover larger areas, thus winning over the population and making insurgency irrelevant.

With limited forces available, the counterinsurgents in Afghanistan have hardly been able to hold areas cleared of the Taliban. For many years the practice of clearing

insurgent-infested areas and then leaving the place disenchanted even the strongest supporters of the government and its foreign partners. Abandoning areas taken back from the insurgents made the population vulnerable to the threat of returning Taliban. The shattered credibility thwarted full-hearted local support in future operations since the population did not trust that the troops would stay on, thinking that either the insurgents or the warlords would move in. This inspired the population to sit on the fence. In other cases, splitting the available troops for deployment in secure “islands” in an “ocean” of insurgents and a hostile population often exposed the isolated posts to constant attacks by mobile and agile insurgent groups.

Taliban Safe Havens in Pakistan

Few insurgencies have survived without safe havens abroad. The presence of the operational and logistic infrastructure of the Taliban and other anti–Afghan government insurgents, including the Haqani network and the Hekmatyar militant group, in Pakistani, as well as their dependence on the Pakistani army and Pakistani intelligence for sustaining their war, allows Pakistan to exert a significant level of control and influence over them. Although Pakistan may see the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan as neither possible nor desirable, it uses its control and influence over them as leverage to secure its regional geopolitical interests through its influence in Afghanistan. While a US ally in fighting terrorism and extremism, Pakistan views the challenge in the context of its regional interests, including its geopolitical vision of Afghanistan as the strategic depth in its long-standing dispute with India over Kashmir. Pakistan has made repeated attempts in recent times to help install a pliable, subordinate regime in Kabul, including the Taliban government (1994–2001). Pakistan’s recent military

operation Zarb-e-Azb (2014–2016) against violent extremists in the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) targeted the militants that fight against the Pakistani government, leaving the Haqani network and other Taliban groups that fight in Afghanistan mostly untouched. Meanwhile, as a result of the Pakistani military drive, tens of thousands of Afghan and Pakistani Taliban, as well as foreign extremist groups, were pushed into Afghanistan. Some of these groups moved to the north and destabilized areas not sufficiently covered by the Afghan forces.[19]

There is little proof so far to corroborate Pakistan's claim that in fighting militancy it makes no distinction between good and bad Taliban. It is widely believed, however, in Afghanistan and among the NATO alliance that Islamabad is playing a double game, targeting the anti-Pakistan terrorists while using the anti-Afghan Taliban to advance its policy goals in Afghanistan. So far, Pakistan has failed to take action on Kabul's repeated calls to restrict the free movement of the Taliban leaders and remove their logistic infrastructure in Pakistan—leaders who plan and conduct acts of terrorism in Afghanistan from bases on Pakistani soil. Nor are there indications that Pakistani intelligence has moved against the Pakistan-based Haqani network, which is listed as an international terrorist group.

The Weakness of the Afghan Government

Another source of trouble affecting counterinsurgency is the weakness of the Afghan government. No amount of military power, foreign or domestic, will gain much unless the Afghan government improves its capacity to control its territory, win the trust of the people, and prevent infiltration and subversion from abroad.

The majority of the people in troubled Afghan provinces do not support the return of the Taliban. Recent surveys

indicate that since 2009 public sympathy for the Taliban and other Armed Opposition Groups (AOGs) has decreased steadily over the years.[20] The Taliban and other AOGs maintain their power bases in rural areas, where government control is weaker. The loosely governed space is exploited by the insurgents, criminal groups, and opportunistic militia commanders, while the local population is less inclined to take the risk of challenging the insurgents on behalf of a government that can neither protect them nor offer services.

In the unstable environments of post-Taliban Afghanistan, the overemphasis on state security at the expense of the rule of law left the public vulnerable to an array of security threats. Moreover, bearing the existence and activity of illicit power structures at the local level undermines the legitimate authority of the police, which is duty bound not only to act against the state enemies but also to protect the population from criminals, local thugs, corrupt officials, and predatory illicit patronage networks.

A rampant official corruption has been a major challenge faced by the developmental process in Afghanistan. Corruption impedes governance effectiveness. It undermines peoples' trust in the government, hinders improvement in security and development, and facilitates Taliban inroads in the country. The most damaging aspect of corruption is its core political sources. According to the recent annual surveys by the Berlin-based Transparency International, Afghanistan has been repeatedly ranked at the bottom of the list of some 180 countries in terms of the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI).

The development of good governance in Afghanistan is the key to stability and peace. During the past 50 years, insurgencies mostly failed to win against effective governments. While the insurgents always need foreign sponsorship and outside sanctuaries, governments fare

better as they operate out of established bases. However, as a new study of recent insurgencies indicates, “governments defeat themselves more often than they are defeated by a dominant insurgency.”[21] The failure of government to address the root causes of the insurgency and the loss of control of the territory, particularly in the rural areas, helps the insurgents.

Major Counterinsurgency Operations

The fight against insurgents across the country was conducted mostly by separate battalion-sized task forces of foreign and Afghan National Defense and Security Forces aided by close air support. In exceptional cases, larger forces were deployed in single operations or in several simultaneous drives. The operations were often supported by Special Forces groups that acted jointly with the attacking force or conducted separate missions and raids against high-value targets. The Special Operation task forces were deployed in forward bases in Bagram, Kandahar, Zabul, Urozgan, Ghazni, Helmand, and Mazar-i-Sharif.

In 2004 and 2005, in preparation for the presidential and parliamentary elections, most of the counterinsurgency operations were conducted against the Taliban mountain hideouts and remote bases in the eastern and southern mountains of Kunar, Nuristan, Urozgan, Zabul, and Helmand Provinces. The mountain warfare, however, turned disastrous for a US Special Forces’ detachment in the summer of 2005, when it launched an operation in the Pech District of Kunar Province, where in an ambush set by the insurgents three of the four SEALS were killed and the fourth, Marcus Luttrell, was wounded;[22] he was rescued by a local villager, who ultimately saved his life.[23] This event

later inspired the American film, *Lone Survivor*, released in 2013, which is based on this operation.

In 2006, with the expansion of NATO to the south, the new alignment was tested in the serious fighting that took place in the Panjwaii District of Kandahar during a coalition operation code-named Operation Medusa, considered NATO's first large-scale offensive operation in its history.[24] Operation Medusa achieved a tactical victory through numerous firefights with the Taliban. It inflicted heavy losses on them but failed to break their will to fight.[25] The continued flow of reinforcements from across the border kept the Taliban forces capable of reasserting their presence in areas cleared by the coalition but not held strongly due to the lack of troops.[26]

Throughout 2007, counterinsurgency operations continued at a higher tempo by US, ISAF, and Afghanistan national security forces. The most significant operation of the year was in December, the recapture of Musa Qala after nine months of Taliban occupation. The Battle of Musa Qala came at the culmination of a long process of military and peacemaking efforts in the north Helmand district of Musa Qala. The district's population, of some 40,000 to 45,000, was threatened by constant Taliban attacks. After the expansion of NATO forces in southern Afghanistan, a small British unit deployed into the district in mid-June 2006 as part of NATO's controversial "platoon house strategy," in which small groups of soldiers defended district centers in far-flung places around the province, such as Musa Qala and Sangin. The platoon house strategy created several isolated military posts attacked by the Taliban, causing heavy casualties among the British. This tactic, used by the British in Northern Ireland, was out of place in Afghanistan and was criticized by the US command for exposing small units in fixed positions as sitting ducks to mobile Taliban attacks. As the ISAF commander, General David Richards, believed, the

“platoon house” scheme was not an appropriate method in Helmand for fighting the insurgents.[27] However, under pressure from the Afghan provincial governor, British troops “ended up being spread out in fixed positions in a number of small towns—in the so called ‘platoon houses’—where they attracted intense enemy activity and suffered significant losses.”[28] The isolated British garrison (platoon house) at Musa Qala was soon besieged and came under continuous attacks by the Taliban. A relief operation had to be conducted by a full battalion-sized task force. Operation Snakebite broke through the Taliban lines in early August 2006.

The British position, however, was untenable, and in another controversial move designed to end fighting and civilian casualties, the British ceded control of the district to local tribal elders with the arrangement that neither British nor Taliban forces would enter the district.[29] After the withdrawal of the British troops, the Taliban violated the agreement, and up to 300 fighters overran the town in February 2007, occupying the district center. The nine-month Taliban occupation was a reincarnation of the Taliban’s strict rule of the 1990s.

The battle to drive the Taliban out of Musa Qala was planned during November and December and was conducted by the British, the Afghan National Army (ANA), and ISAF forces, which were covered by close air support. Launched on December 7, 2007, the offensive forced the Taliban to retreat into the mountains after three days of fierce fighting. The town was officially announced clear of Taliban on December 12, when the ANA captured the center of the town. This was the first battle in the Afghan war in which the ANA units were the principal fighting force and the operation was led by the Afghans. The Musa Qala battle was part of a wider military operation that continued

throughout the year in Helmand, including in Sangin, south of Musa Qala.

2008: The Moment of Truth

With a growing insurgency, increasing violence, and the spread of militants' suicide attacks in 2008, Afghanistan was seen as being at a tipping point where its government's legitimacy (along with that of its international backers) was being openly challenged by an array of antigovernment forces. The Taliban had long operated a shadow government in Afghanistan's most dangerous areas, and its power had reached Kabul's doorstep. Meanwhile, US and NATO-ISAF operations, alongside Afghan National Army forces, continued against the Taliban through 2008.

The insurgents recorded a number of major tactical victories over the ISAF and the ANA in the summer and fall of 2008. In July, a small American military unit in a remote area suffered heavy losses during a coordinated Taliban assault. Described as America's Black Hawk Down of the Afghan war, the Wanat battle was fought on July 13, 2008. A force of some 200 Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters attacked a US military outpost near Quam in the Waygal district of the eastern Nuristan Province, which was defended by a US infantry platoon. The militants broke through the American lines and penetrated into the base before they were forced back by coalition artillery fire and aerial bombing. Given the small size of the US unit, it lost a significant part of its troops, with nine killed in action and 27 wounded. This was seen as the highest number of casualties in a single battle since the start of US operations in 2001.

In the following month, a French army ISAF contingent suffered a disastrous setback in a Taliban ambush outside the Sper-Kunday village in the Uzbin Valley of the Sorobi District, east of Kabul. A column of some 100 mostly French

troops in 20 vehicles was ambushed by the Hizb-i-Islami Hekmatyar insurgents, killing nine and wounding 18 French soldiers before the column was extricated by reinforcements. On August 20, French president Nicolas Sarkozy traveled to Kabul to honor his country's fallen servicemen and speak to the French soldiers stationed in Afghanistan. He reasserted his commitment to pursuing the war against the Taliban. The incident, however, led to a sharp decline in public support in France for French involvement in the Afghan war. Two months later, ISAF and Afghan forces returned to Sper-Kunday and reestablished government control.

A third devastating Taliban attack occurred on November 27, 2008, against the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) when a government supply convoy was ambushed in the Bala-Murghab district of northwestern Badghis Province bordering Turkmenistan. The supply convoy, guarded by a 200-man detachment of army and police, was surprised in an ambush set in a narrow gorge near Bala-Murghab. A fierce firefight lasted several hours, ending only after the arrival of Afghan commandos in helicopters. Five policemen and nine soldiers were killed; 20 soldiers were wounded and another 20 captured. Nineteen vehicles were destroyed and five captured by the Taliban. The Spanish military component of the ISAF based in Qala-i-Naw was too constrained by so-called national caveats to respond to calls for help and merely provided cover from a distance for the retreating convoy.

The violence in 2008 was also marked by some spectacular suicide attacks in the heart of the Afghan capital against the most-protected targets. On January 14, a Taliban suicide squad attacked the luxury Serena Hotel near the Presidential Palace, where a Norwegian delegation headed by the country's foreign minister was staying at the hotel. There were six fatalities, including a Norwegian

journalist, and six wounded. Later in the year, the Indian Embassy in Kabul was hit by a suicide terror attack on July 7, killing 58 and wounding 141 people. US intelligence officials traced the attack to Pakistan's ISI intelligence agency, and President Bush warned the Pakistani government that he would take "serious action" if such an attack happened again. Still, 15 months later, the Indian Embassy was again attacked by suicide bombers on October 8, 2009, killing 17 people and wounding 63. In the following months of 2008, the Taliban hit several high-value targets, particularly in Kabul and Kandahar, where nearly 140 people were killed in two days. Another Taliban masterstroke occurred on June 13 when insurgents raided the Sar-Pooza prison in Kandahar and freed 400 to 1,000 inmates.

During the summer of 2009 a series of security operations was conducted across the country in support of the presidential election held on August 20. The largest operation of the year, code-named Operation Strike of the Sword (Operation Khanjar, Operation Dagger), was launched in July by about 4,000 US marines from the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade, commanded by Brigadier General Larry Nicholson, and 650 Afghan troops supported by NATO aircraft. The marines were part of the first wave of 21,000 surge troops sent to Afghanistan; Operation Khanjar was the first major offensive by some of the over 10,000 marines that were deployed in southern Afghanistan in early June 2009. Described as the largest marine offensive since the Battle of Fallujah in Iraq in 2004,[30] the operation became the largest airlift offensive by the US marines since Vietnam. It was spearheaded by two marine infantry battalions and one light armored reconnaissance battalion against three major towns along a 75-mile stretch of the Helmand River Valley, south of Lashkargah. On July 2, the column moved south from Camp Leatherneck, northwest of Lashkargah, along the Helmand Valley, and then branched out into three

battalion columns advancing against Garmsir in the north, Nawa-i-Barakzai in the center, and Khan-Neshin in the south. Faced with a major NATO offensive by overwhelming troops, the Taliban abandoned the towns in Central Helmand, letting the NATO troops clear the area in less than one week with no serious opposition. The insurgents, however, merely shifted their forces to northern Helmand or retreated across the border to Pakistan.

Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, the big US offensive was seen as simply forcing the Taliban fighters to the unstable areas in the west and north. The habitual dislocation of the Taliban forces in the face of pending large military sweeps raised the question of whether the strategy of the ISAF's new commander, General McKrystal, would work with the existing NATO forces in Afghanistan—the strategy of "clear, hold, and build." This issue was debated throughout 2009 in policy-making circles and led to the increased deployment of US troops in Afghanistan and a counterinsurgency strategy announced at the end of 2009 by President Obama.

Continued but fragmented NATO military actions against the Taliban local strongholds drove the insurgents to diversify their fighting tactics in order to adapt to the changing situation. While they continued raids on isolated Afghan government targets and its police and army posts, the Taliban and their foreign militant allies increased suicide attacks on convoys, IED-based road warfare, and spectacular terrorist attacks in Kabul and other major cities for their political and psychological impact. The Taliban suicide squads often broke their way into protected targets with a suicide explosion conducted by one member of the team, allowing the rest of the squad to storm the target building and go on a killing spree until they were killed. The Taliban made many such attacks, most of them traced to the Haqani group, based in Northern Waziristan, with close links to Pakistan intelligence and al-Qaeda.

The most devastating terrorist attack of the year and a major setback for US intelligence was a suicide attack on December 30 by the al-Qaeda operative Human Kahlil Abu-Mulal al-Balwai against the CIA facility inside Forward Operation Base Chapman, near the eastern Afghan city of Khost, about 10 miles from the Pakistani border. Posing as a CIA collaborator, offering to report the location of the al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, Balwai visited the CIA camp and on arrival detonated a bomb attached to a vest he was wearing. The explosion killed seven American CIA officers and an Afghan working for the CIA and wounded six other American CIA officers. The suicide bombing was described as the most lethal attack against the CIA in more than 25 years.

The Military Surge and the Exit Strategy

By 2008, seven years into the US-led effort to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan, the mission was on the verge of failing. This unsettling reality was the result of key international and Afghan actors pursuing a narrow strategy for years that focused almost exclusively on short-term goals at the expense of a broader and more cohesive strategy. Afghanistan, consequently, was plagued by a threat environment shaped and sustained by an expanding insurgency, widespread criminality, ineffective governance, and the absence of a coordinated response to continuing challenges. Violence inside the country had risen steadily since 2006, and by 2008 the violence level in Afghanistan exceeded that in Iraq.

During the presidential campaign in the United States, Barack Obama pledged that Afghanistan, “the good war,” would be his administration’s top foreign policy priority. Right after his election, Obama’s advisers reviewed the situation in and around Afghanistan with the objective of

developing a strategy that would be successful against the dynamic, highly adaptive insurgency that was ravaging the country.

Several years of a poorly resourced counterterrorism and counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan in the face of a growing Taliban-led insurgency had convinced Washington that it was neither winning nor losing in Afghanistan—a situation that required a serious reassessment of the war. Altering the situation needed either a significant increase in troops and other resources or a narrowing of the political and strategic objectives in Afghanistan that could be achievable with a smaller number of additional forces, with reduced developmental costs, and in a shorter time. The choice depended on defining the political objectives in Afghanistan and in the region. Assuming the objective to be preventing Afghanistan from again becoming a sanctuary of transnational extremists, including al-Qaeda, the military leaders argued that the objective could not be achieved without more troops and without pursuing a fully resourced counterinsurgency campaign. Such an option entailed the commitment of larger forces over a longer period of time and also involved nation building. Most of president's political advisors, however, favored a narrower goal, short of nation building and focused on counterterrorism.

Although the policy debates were focused on how to win in Afghanistan or how not to lose, it was not clear what victory meant. At what cost? And in what time frame? The three principal means of achieving stabilization in Afghanistan included

- the US-led NATO military forces;
- the effectiveness of the Afghan government;
- Pakistani cooperation to remove the Taliban and terrorist bases on its territory and to stem the cross-border attacks on Afghanistan.

As noted earlier, the ISAF commander demanded 30,000 more troops, in addition to the 17,000 troops, augmented by 4,000 enablers, approved by the Bush administration. Obama, however, intended to send the additional troops in the context of a well-defined strategy of limited objective—a responsible exit strategy. It took the president nearly one year to adopt and announce his new strategy and the number of troops that were to deploy in Afghanistan. "Obama simply wanted the 'bad' war in Iraq to be ended and once in office the US role in Afghanistan—the so called good war—to be limited in scope and duration. . . . The ensuing debate narrowed the objective."[31]

While foreign military forces were needed to create the space and time for the development of the Afghan government and its national security forces, the key element of stabilization was considered to be an effective Afghan government. The Obama administration viewed the Afghan government under President Karzai as a weak, corrupt, and indecisive government and an unreliable partner. Over the years, President Karzai had been doing a very difficult job under very trying conditions. International promises to rebuild wartorn Afghanistan were not timely or fully realized; the US-led stabilization operations were underresourced; the most corrupt Afghan power brokers and warlords were allies of the United States in the war on terror; and the antiterrorist operations were focused in Afghanistan, neglecting their safe havens across the border in Pakistan. As the leader of a sovereign state, Karzai had little control over the operation of foreign forces in the country and the use of aid money. He was being blamed for failures for which the international actors shared the responsibility.

But Karzai also had his own flaws. Personally a patriot and a man of integrity, Karzai did aspire to lead his country to peace and stability. But he rarely made serious efforts to

mobilize the relevant indigenous capacity and available international aid in pursuance of a clearly defined and consistent strategy. He lacked a strong political base, such as a nationwide political party. As a Pashtun leader, he did not command the support of all Pashtuns, and he was not a warlord with a wide patronage network. Since the key figures of the former Northern Alliance played a decisive role in having him selected chairman of the post-Taliban Transitional Authority in Afghanistan in 2001 and supported his bid for the presidency of the transitional government in 2002, he rarely managed to completely free himself from the strong influence of the Alliance leaders and associates, and he continued to favor them over his allies and comrades who were “brothers-in-reform.” Further, instead of building a nationwide political constituency in support of constitutionalism and reform, Karzai preferred to preside over a fragmented polity where he could balance off the power and influence of different factions and individuals in his tactical maneuvers. This made him a strong president in a weak system, enabling him to manipulate the weaker actors and make deals with the stronger ones. The situation impeded the development of strong state institutions, the rule of law, and winning the trust of the population. These weaknesses were exploited by the insurgents, who grew stronger by default.

Due to Karzai’s peculiar leadership style, which he found convenient under the circumstances, the overly centralized government system became also individualized under Karzai. Reared in the tribal politics of Afghanistan and influenced by his experience with the fragmented and opportunistic *Jihadi* politics in exile during the last decades of the twentieth century, Karzai often pursued traditional tribal ways of governance, where personal relationships often supplanted institutional dictates. This became an administrative impediment since a lot of the extensive

power invested in the presidency could not be fully exercised by one man and his few close aides. Karzai was a political loner trying to fix things personally, often through micromanagement, at the expense of tackling more important and complex political, security, and economic problems. His few close aides often acted opportunistically, serving him as yes men while criticizing his policies behind his back. The most damaging effect of the situation was the personalization of the government's domestic and foreign policies, which were often decided at the personal whim of the president with little consistency and were not based on well-established policies and national consensus.

One of the major challenges faced by Karzai was his relation with the United States and other international partners. The key problems were miscommunication, misunderstanding, and misperception. Karzai's strong protests against increasing civilian casualties during US and NATO military operations and the night raids by Special Forces on terrorist and insurgent targets hidden in residential areas in Afghan towns and villages soured his relations with the coalition partners. On the other hand the focus of his US and NATO allies was on using their technological edge (air strikes and special operation assets) as force multipliers to offset the low force-to-space disadvantage. The negative impacts of the situation included the imposition of restrictions by President Karzai on the operations of the Special Forces and the limiting of the direct air support of the ground forces by the Alliance air power. This had a reverse effect on the morale of the Afghan forces and caused heavier casualties among Afghan army and police units. President Karzai also complained that the outsiders failed to fully respect Afghanistan's sovereignty when they created parallel governing structures, ran their own jails inside Afghanistan, and empowered nonstate actors by awarding lucrative contracts to them. Meanwhile,

the United States was frustrated by the Karzai government's failure to crack down on official corruption, fostering nepotism and tolerating the unlawful activities of his cronies, and by his lack of decisiveness in addressing the issues related to security, governance, and the economy. Since the summer of 2006, when the insurgency had a dramatic upsurge, the security situation in Afghanistan, particularly in the south, deteriorated and civilian casualties increased. Continued collateral damage during military offensives, not closely coordinated with the Afghan authorities, led to further frustration, causing Karzai to take a confrontational tone beginning in the autumn of 2008. This coincided with the presidential election of President Obama in the United States, who took a heavy-handed approach toward Kabul, calling on the Karzai government to "get his act together," with curtailing corruption as his first goal.

The intervention of US officials in Afghanistan's presidential elections in 2009 deepened the mistrust. Karzai became increasingly suspicious of his international allies and subscribed to all kinds of conspiracy theories that alarmed the UN and US diplomats. The UN top diplomat in Afghanistan, Kai Eide, later wrote that the president "could explode in meetings with his own advisors as well as with foreign representatives and visiting dignitaries. He seemed not to listen anymore. . . . The British and Americans were his main targets. . . . Sometimes his attacks against British or American representatives were made in public. . . . Karzai's outbursts were also aimed at his own most loyal ministers and advisors. He would confront them with the most unfair accusations, often of being too pro-Western. . . . Our meetings with the president were increasingly focused on damage limitations." The situation so much alarmed the international partners that they wondered whether they could work five more years with Karzai.[32] American

intelligence reports on Karzai claimed he was “erratic” and even “delusional.”[33] Eide, however, sympathized with Karzai for being pressured by international politicians who at the same time never attempted to marginalize the corrupt power brokers but continued to make contracts with well-known corrupt Afghans.[34]

Karzai’s personal grudges against Washington had a negative impact on the country’s relationship with its international partners, particularly the United States, whose military and financial support has been crucial to sustaining the ANDSF and consolidating the Afghan state. Karzai’s controversial public outbursts criticizing the way Afghanistan’s international partners prosecuted counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations hardly helped resolve the differences between Kabul and Washington.

The Policy Debate

Just 10 days into his presidency, Obama asked the former CIA analyst Bruce Riedel to do a strategic review of Afghanistan and Pakistan. In less than two months, Riedel recommended an integrated civilian-military counterinsurgency campaign for Afghanistan and a focus on the “real, central threat–Pakistan.”[35] Riedel’s final report was reviewed by the Obama national security team in mid-March 2009. The report recommended “disrupting the terrorist network in Afghanistan and especially Pakistan, promoting a more effective government in Afghanistan, developing the Afghan security forces, ending Pakistan’s support for terrorist and insurgent groups, enhancing civilian control in Pakistan, and using US diplomatic, military and intelligence channels to reduce enmity and distrust between Pakistan and India.”[36] The recommendation argued that a

fully resourced counterinsurgency campaign would enable the United States to regain the initiative and defend its vital interests. Except for Vice President Biden, all the principals concurred in the recommendation and supported the deployment of the 17,000 troops already approved and the 4,000 trainers for the Afghan security forces.

Although there was little disagreement about the goal of the new US strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Obama national security team was divided over how to achieve it. The military commanders and the joint chiefs pushed for a fully resourced counterinsurgency; the president's political advisers favored what was termed the hybrid options or counterterrorism-plus strategy, meaning a combination of counterterrorism and training the Afghan forces. By summer 2009, the polarization deepened as the Obama foreign policy team was splintered, aligning the White House against the Defense Department and joint chiefs.

In June 2009, General Stanley McChrystal, who was appointed to take over the ISAF command in Afghanistan, was commissioned to make a commander's assessment of Afghanistan. The 60-day assessment presented in September concluded that without additional troops the mission in Afghanistan would fail within the next 12 months. "Failure to provide adequate resources," the report asserted, "also risks a longer conflict, greater casualties, higher overall costs, and ultimately, a critical loss of political support. Any of these risks, in turn, are likely to result in mission failure."[37] In order to change the situation and achieve the strategic goal, McChrystal proposed a fully resourced counterinsurgency campaign to reverse the Taliban momentum. He also stated that at the end of the day Afghanistan could only be stabilized by the Afghans, through improved governance and curbing corruption.

McChrystal argued that given the counterinsurgency doctrine's norms of 20 security men for each 1,000 residents, there was a need for 480,000 soldiers and police for Afghanistan's assumed population of 24 million to conduct the campaign. His assessment found that Afghanistan needed at least 400,000 security force personnel—240,000 in the army and 160,000 in the police—to have a reasonable ability to combat the threat. In the summer of 2009, the ANA numbered 92,000, while the Afghan National Police (ANP) was 84,000 strong. So, until the ANDSF reached its goal of 400,000, an additional 40,000 coalition forces, mostly American, were needed to provide the "bridge" capability of sufficient security forces until the ANDSF could assume a larger role.[38] McChrystal proposed that one brigade of about 10,000 men should be added every three months over the course of a year. The fourth brigade was to replace the departing troops from the Netherlands and Canada. At the time that the McChrystal request for additional troops was made (in September), there were about 68,000 American troops in Afghanistan.

Opposition to the surge was grounded in fears that it could lead to a large, open-ended US military presence in Afghanistan, causing public resentment there. Other concerns were related to the perception that the United States did not have a strong partner in Afghanistan under President Karzai's government. US ambassador Karl Eikenberry, a vocal critic of a military surge, argued that the success of counterinsurgency required a reliable partner, "which was not currently the case in Afghanistan." He opined that the United States was not aligned with the Kabul government, which rendered it "severely hindered by Karzai's weakness as president," and Washington was dealing with an "extraordinarily corrupt government."[39] The view of Karzai as being an unreliable partner was also shared by Richard Holbrooke, US special envoy for

Afghanistan and Pakistan. Holbrooke very much wanted to see Karzai lose the election to a "more credible" contender. While he was calling for a fair and free presidential election planned for August 2009, in reality he wanted to see enough credible candidates in the running to deny Karzai's majority in the vote, forcing a runoff in which Karzai could be defeated.[40] Even before the votes were counted, Holbrooke was pushing for a runoff.[41] With massive official rigging in the election, an elaborate auditing process indicated that there was no clear winner in the first round.[42] The runoff, however, did not take place, as Karzai's rival, Abdullah, dropped out, and Karzai was declared the winner.

Pakistan was another key consideration for the critics of the counterinsurgency strategy. The critics were led by Vice President Biden. In order to win Pakistan's support for his strategy, Obama proposed to Pakistan's president, Asef Ali Zardari, a "long term strategic partnership." In a personal letter, hand delivered by his national security advisor, General James Jones, in Islamabad on November 13, 2009, Obama proposed to Zardari that "if your government will match my gesture, I will commit my government to deepening and broadening our work together, particularly in the area of counterterrorism cooperation, with the goal of defeating al-Qaeda, Tahrik-i-Taliban-e Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e Taiba (LeT), the Haqani network, the Afghan Taliban" and others.[43] Meanwhile, Jones made it clear that if a destructive attack on the United States originated from Pakistan, there would be a response from the United States. Responding to the Obama letter, the Pakistani government, as usual, played the victim, blaming India for using Afghanistan's territory to perpetrate violence in Pakistan, while Pakistan's contribution to the war against al-Qaeda and the Taliban was "second to none." The response came about one month after a terrorist attack on the Indian Embassy in Kabul, which was traced to the Pakistani

intelligence agency, the ISI. In any case, the policy of “carrot” did not impress Pakistan, and there was no “stick” attached to it.

The lengthy policy debate following McChrystal’s assessment lasted for two months and was influenced by three diverging approaches to dealing with the situation in Afghanistan: the military emphasized sending additional troops for a counterinsurgency campaign as long as it was required; the minimalist approach proposed by Vice President Biden and Obama’s political advisors was for a counterterrorism-plus option; and the policy choices of President Obama, who was very much interested in seeing the war in Afghanistan ended by the time he left office. In the words of Secretary Gates, Obama had lost faith in the very war strategy he approved and wanted most to find a way out of combat. For him it was “all about getting out.”

The military supported McChrystal’s plan for waging a textbook counterinsurgency campaign focused on protecting populations with the deployment of sufficient forces using the “inkspot” technique and expanding it as more troops became available. This involved the well-known approach of “clear, hold, build, and transfer” for insurgency-afflicted areas. General McChrystal listed three options for additional troops. The first called for 10,000 to 11,000 troops, mainly for training the Afghan security forces. The middle option required 40,000 troops for counterinsurgency and was focused on protecting the population. The last option doubled the number to 85,000 for a more robust counterinsurgency. The general, however, recommended the middle option of 40,000 additional troops.

The final decision made by Obama, which was announced in December 2009, was a hybrid of all these approaches. A major troop escalation, numbering 30,000, was approved to reverse the Taliban momentum, but it had to be gradually withdrawn after 18 months. By doing so, he overruled the

domestic political concerns of his political advisors. Meanwhile, against the advice of his generals, he imposed deadlines on the military surge in Afghanistan to avoid the impression of an endless war and to sustain political support in Congress and among the public. Gates later wrote:

> Obama's decision to dramatically increase the number of US troops in Afghanistan in late 2009 . . . was based on a number of assumptions agreed upon by his top advisers: that the Pakistanis could be induced to change their hedging strategy, Karzai could be coached to become a more effective president, Afghan corruption could be reduced, and the Afghan central government's reputation among the people and its capabilities could be improved. The challenges to achieving those goals were fully debated leading up to the president's major troop escalation in the fall of 2009.[44]

There was a lot of wishful thinking in the case of changing Pakistan and of civilian assistance to Afghanistan.

In his speech at West Point on December 1, 2009, Obama announced that he was sending 30,000 more US troops to Afghanistan as part of a strategy to reverse the Taliban's momentum and build the Afghan government's capacity, allowing the United States to begin drawing down its forces in July 2011.[45] The ensuing military surge—which raised the level of the US-led International Security Assistant Force to over 140,000 (including 100,000 US service members)—and a new population-centered stabilization strategy may have been the first serious counterinsurgency effort in the nine-year war.

The US military surge blunted the momentum of the Taliban in key areas. Further, significant progress in building up the ANDSF allowed the gradual shift of security responsibility to Afghanistan as the United States reduced its military presence beginning in July 2011 and withdrew the surge troops by the end of 2012. By that time, the ANDSF reached its new authorized level of 352,000 with the Afghan Local Police (ALP) numbering 12,000. A counterinsurgency campaign, however, required patience and time to succeed. The full number of surge troops hardly

stayed in Afghanistan for more than one year. It took them about six months to deploy, and they began withdrawing in July 2011—just about one year after their full deployment. Political pressure and financial constraints in donor countries eroded support for an extended counterinsurgency effort, leading to a calendar-driven drawdown of US forces at the end of 2014.

The Transition

The transition in Afghanistan has often been described as the transfer of security responsibility to Afghanistan, which allowed the US-NATO forces to make a responsible exit from their combat mission in Afghanistan at the end of 2014. In this context the “transition” amounted to an exit strategy focused on extricating the coalition forces from a long and costly war in the country. The success of such a transition depends on the capacity of ANDSF and the survival of the Afghan state following the withdrawal of foreign troops as well as on the level of the commitment of the international community in assisting Afghanistan in the posttransition period. The deciding factor is sustaining the political, security, social, and economic achievements made during the past 14 years in Afghanistan. These achievements make the basis of a real transition that surpasses the exit of foreign troops and may last for years, if not decades.

During the past 14 years (2001–2015), Afghanistan underwent a wide and deep sociopolitical transformation that has created a critical mass in support of achieving peace and stability through a democratic process. The situation has reduced the clout of ultrastate patronage networks, ethnic-based factions, and regional strongmen. A new educated generation that has come of age during this period is more oriented toward the peaceful means of acquiring power than the use of force. True, due to the

ineffectiveness of the national government, many people still associate themselves with tribal, ethnic, and regional networks or power brokers, but their association is solely out of tactical need amid an uncertain security environment. They use these factions as a means to secure their interests, which the national government is unable to provide.

The roadmap for the NATO exit from Afghanistan was adopted at the London International Conference in January 2010. Its highlights included the transition of security responsibility to Afghan control, the significant institutional enhancement of Afghanistan's national security capacity, and support for the Afghan government's national reconciliation plan.[46] The process was endorsed at the NATO summit in Lisbon in November 2010. The heads of state and government recognized the progress in Afghanistan that had enabled an evolution toward an irreversible transition to full Afghan security responsibility and leadership. Ironically, in spite of the final statement of Lisbon that the "transition will be conditions-based, not calendar-driven," it put deadlines on the NATO military withdrawal (2011–2014), which were confirmed in the follow-on conferences in Bonn (December 2011) and Chicago (May 2012), although at the Bonn conference the international community pledged to deepen and broaden its partnership with Afghanistan during the "Transition to Transformation Decade of 2015–2024."

Regardless of any announced intention and the pace of the drawdown in July 2011, the deadlines became part of the strategic calculus for America's allies, the Afghan government and people, the Taliban, Afghanistan's neighbors, and other regional actors. In any committed strategic effort, force drawdown is dictated by operational realities. Imposing time constraints on operations in an uncertain, dynamic environment sends messages of impending weakness. The perception of waning

international resolve boosted the insurgents' confidence that they could win and provided little incentive for them to support any peace talks. It also affected the morale of the population that does not support the Taliban's return to power, but it caused many to reconsider casting their lot with the eventual winner. This perception also was driving regional actors toward a hedging strategy, impeding any hope of effective regional cooperation in stabilizing Afghanistan.

Based on the transition plan, on January 1, 2015, the United States officially concluded Operation Enduring Freedom, and NATO ended the ISAF mission. On the same date Afghanistan took over full security responsibility in the country while the international forces transitioned into a supporting role. Accordingly, the NATO-led Resolute Support (RS) mission, established after the withdrawal of the bulk of international troops, began providing further training and advising and assisting Afghan security forces and institutions. The US forces in Afghanistan transitioned to Operation Freedom's Sentinel, contributing to both NATO's RS mission and continuing US counterterrorism efforts against the remnants of al-Qaeda and local supporters of ISIS.

Looking Ahead

Long-term security and stability in Afghanistan will require strategies focused on two sets of mutually reinforcing measures. One set should be directed toward reducing the threat level, while a second set should aim at building indigenous capacities to respond to actual and potential threats. A synergic combination of the two sets of measures may not only ensure domestic stability in Afghanistan but also contribute to more dynamic security cooperation in the region. Among the first set of measures, efforts to pursue a

political settlement with the Taliban are the most crucial factors. Within the second set of measures, building the capacity of the ANDSF, improving governance, fighting corruption, and strengthening the rule of law are of prime importance.

Reconciliation and Political Settlement

Despite the stated commitment of the Afghan government and its international partners to national reconciliation with the Taliban and other insurgents, the process has long been void of strategic vision, clarity of parameters, and unity of effort.

Afghanistan missed two major opportunities for a comprehensive peace deal with the Taliban. First, in 2001, the Taliban were excluded from the Bonn conference as a party to the Afghan conflict in spite of the interest of a number of Taliban leaders in joining the political process. Further, on December 6, 2001, when the Taliban leadership offered to surrender to Hamid Karzai, the new, internationally selected head of the Afghan Interim Administration,[47] the offer was not taken seriously by the coalition and Afghan leaders. The situation encouraged certain US-backed militias to attack the former Taliban leaders, who had returned to their homes, forcing them to go underground and then flee to safe areas across the border under Pakistani control.

A little over two years later, in the spring of 2003, certain senior Taliban figures contacted Afghan leaders, putting out feelers to see if there was any interest in talks. Their emissaries reached out to President Karzai, Marshal Fahim (vice president and minister of defense), this author (minister of interior), and some others. Their demand looked reasonable on the surface but was unclear in details. As a prerequisite for the peace process, they demanded a

collective Afghan and international guarantee providing them with security and immunity from prosecution as well as permission to act as a political party. This was the time when persistent reports were circulating in Afghanistan that Pakistani intelligence was forcing the Taliban to either fight in Afghanistan against the Kabul government and its foreign allies or risk being reported to the coalition as terrorists.[48] Further, many other former Taliban who returned to their villages were targeted by their domestic rivals or were detained by the coalition forces on suspicions of being linked to the terrorist networks.[49] In such a confused environment and because of a major divergence of policies among domestic and international stakeholders about peace with the Taliban—a movement often considered a spent force—the Taliban feelers were not given due consideration.

Three years later, with the massive return of regrouped Taliban forces to the battlefield in 2006 (the second Taliban war), the Afghan government and its international partners made repeated attempts to initiate a process of national reconciliation. The efforts, however, got mired in the complexities of a rising insurgency, the division within Afghanistan over the parameters of peace with the Taliban, the weakness of the Afghan government, and ambiguities in the US-led coalition strategy in Afghanistan. The situation led to a strategic hedging mood among the domestic and regional actors. Further, once the calendar of the US withdrawal was announced in 2009, the Taliban had little incentive to get seriously engaged in peace talks with the Afghan government. The Taliban's access to safe havens in Pakistan and Islamabad's use of them to secure its geopolitical interests in the region constituted the most difficult obstacle in the way of the peace process.

In recent years, the end of US and NATO combat missions in Afghanistan and the rise of new threats of violent extremism in the region, including by the local supporters of

the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (Sham-Levant), known also as DA'ISH[50] and ISIS, have created a new regional dynamism among major powers, including China and the United States, to support the peace process in Afghanistan. Given that the Taliban and other anti–Afghan government insurgents have their operational and logistic infrastructure in Pakistan, the country has significant control and influence over them and can therefore play a key role in facilitating direct talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government. In 2015, Pakistan did assist in hosting the first direct talks between the Afghan government and Taliban representatives in Murree, Pakistan, on July 7. However, a week later the process suffered a major setback following the announcement of the death of the Taliban leader Mullah Omar, who had died more than two years previously in Karachi, leading to Kabul's suspicions of a Pakistani cover-up. Furthermore, the upsurge of violence in Afghanistan by the new Pakistan-based leadership of the Taliban and the failure of Pakistan to stop public gatherings and the free movement of the Taliban on its soil added to the mistrust. The most recent efforts by the so-called Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), consisting of representatives of Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States, and China, were hindered after the killing of the Taliban leader Akhtar Mansour on May 21, 2016, in a US drone attack in Pakistan. The Pentagon claimed that Mansour was an obstacle to peace talks and had plans to launch a major attack against US and Afghan forces in Afghanistan.[51] Further, Kabul accused Islamabad of failing to implement the commitments it made at the QCG to take action against Pakistan-based Taliban who refuse to participate in peace talks.

There is little hope for a political settlement in the immediate future. Much depends on sincere efforts by Pakistan, the extent of China's and the United States' influence over the process, the situation on the battlefield,

the effectiveness of ANDSF, and the viability and leadership of the Afghanistan Unity Government. In any case, the role of Pakistan, which controls or influences several groups, continues to be crucial in limiting the Taliban's capacity and encouraging them to hold peace talks with Kabul.

Building Indigenous Capacities

As noted earlier, efforts to achieve peace through a political settlement need to be coupled with simultaneous actions aimed at building sufficient capacity to respond to security threats. This includes strengthening the country's indigenous defense and security forces and improving their political, administrative, and economic support system.

In the past 14 years, the ANDSF has come a long way, transforming from an odd assortment of factional militias into a collection of modern security institutions with professional capacity and loyalty to a unified state. In spite of specific capability gaps, the ANDSF independently faced the upsurge of insurgency in 2015 and 2016 and to a large extent held its own, albeit with higher casualty rates. Given the complex political and security context of the situation in and around Afghanistan, the ANDSF is expected to face continued security threats and violence at least in the immediate future while international military and financial assistance dwindles.

The ANDSF has long been dependent on US support for its operations. The fast-paced numerical force generation of the ANDSF during the transition period left little time to develop capabilities that need more time and elaborate infrastructures. The current size of the ANDSF (352,000) is adequate to fulfill its mission, but it hinges on forces being maintained at their authorized levels and international funding support being received at least until 2020. In fact, a NATO summit in Warsaw in July 2016 made the commitment to "continue national contributions to the financial

sustainment of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, including until the end of 2020."[52] Meanwhile, President Obama announced in July 2016 that his administration had requested $3.45 billion in its 2017 budget to assist the ANDSF and promised to recommend to his successor that the United States continue to seek funding for the ANDSF at or near current levels through 2020. Moreover, other donors at the NATO summit pledged more than $800 million annually for 2018–2020 to sustain the ANDSF.[53] About three months later a donor conference on October 5 in Brussels pledged continued international political and financial support for Afghanistan over the next four years. The total sum committed by the international community is 15.2 billion dollars, representing an exceptional level of funding, which ensures that Afghanistan will continue to move toward economic stability, state building, and development. The regional stakeholders and the international community also reaffirmed their commitment to a political process directed toward lasting peace and reconciliation.[54]

The level of long-term funding will depend on the threat level, the amount of domestic revenue, and the possibility of downsizing the ANDSF. The political settlement of the conflict will be the key factor in the ANDSF's financial sustainability, because such a settlement will reduce the need for maintaining a large force and drastically cut the cost of security operations.[55]

Meanwhile, a successful security transition in Afghanistan also depends on long-term professional and technical international assistance to the ANDSF. The nature and extent of a long-term US-Afghanistan partnership is defined in the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA), which was signed by the Afghan National Unity Government on September 30, 2014.

In a revision of his earlier policy of nearly total withdrawal of the US military by the end of 2016, President Obama announced in July 2016 that the United States will maintain about 8,400 American troops in Afghanistan until the end of his term—rather than drawing down to 5,500 troops as previously planned—leaving his successor to decide on the level of future US military commitment in the country. These US forces serve alongside approximately 6,876 forces from NATO allies and partner nations who are committed to Afghanistan's continued development.[56]

The US troops are engaged in training, advising, and assisting the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces and conducting counterterrorism missions. Earlier in June 2016, the White House loosened the rules of engagement for American troops to give them the ability to fight the Taliban directly, and more flexibility to carry out airstrikes or wage ground combat. Previously, US commanders, under the RS mandate, were authorized only to use airstrikes to protect US forces on the ground, to protect Afghan forces when they faced being overrun by the Taliban, and to go after the Islamic State or the remnants of al-Qaeda.

Whether the presence of reduced US troops in Afghanistan can make a major difference is hard to determine since there are other domestic and regional factors that affect the situation. However, the absence of the US forces in Afghanistan will definitely make an adverse impact on the effectiveness of the ANDSF as well as on the regional strategic balance.

Government

The security transition in Afghanistan is closely linked to a political, economic, and regional transition. Although the political transition in Afghanistan was threatened by disputes over the results of the presidential election of

2014, the tension was eventually defused tactically by a US-mediated power-sharing deal under the rubric of “National Unity Government” (NUG), in which the winner, Ashraf Ghani, was announced as the president and the runner-up, Abdullah Abdullah, assumed the office of the chief executive, a quasi–prime minister, pending the legitimization of the post of prime minister through possible constitutional amendments in two years. Since its inception, the NUG has unsuccessfully struggled to reconcile the competing demands of maintaining unity and governing effectively. The situation has significantly eroded its ability to enhance security and deliver services.

One obstacle is the government’s dependence on divided constituencies, which are rooted in the election campaign, which was directed more toward bagging votes than making a difference. This led both Ghani and Abdullah to depend on borrowed constituencies and get odd bedfellows on their tickets who pursue extremely different visions, interests, and concerns, making it more difficult to govern effectively. The two teams forming the government—between the president and chief executive officer (CEO)—comprise various political factions who expect to be rewarded for their support in the election. Only when the choices of the two teams are politically and professionally integrated into a unified governance body will there be hope for a viable and effective NUG.

Power-sharing arrangements do not have a good track record in Afghanistan’s recent history. It might have been less troublesome had the dispute over the votes and the counting procedure been resolved through recounting under international supervision to declare a single winner of the poll. However, the unjustified fear of internal strife convinced the candidates and the United States that the dispute must be settled through a power-sharing deal. The deal, however, came as a major setback in Afghanistan’s

democratic transition, although it was seen as a necessary price to pay for stability.

If legitimacy could not be derived through elections, it must now be secured through government performance and meeting Afghan citizens' expectations. It implies a strong unified commitment to reforms and cooperative decision making on the basis of a unified national agenda. Such a cohesiveness is hard to achieve under the current deal. The record of the government's first two years in office (September 2014–September 2016) is mixed. The NUG improved relations with the donor community, particularly with the United States, which were troubled during the last years of Karzai's administration. The renewal of full partnership with the United States helped to reassure long-term international commitment to security and development in Afghanistan. Further, the NUG managed to uphold the coalition, albeit at the expense of government effectiveness. Beyond that, the peculiar structure of the administration impeded the fulfillment of pledges made by the coalition leaders. In spite of promises to crack down on corruption, reform the election system, improve the economy, and create jobs, few tangible changes have been made. Many great ideas are being tossed around, and many attractive plans are being drawn out with little implementation. Actions taken to reduce corruption have been selective, inconsistent, and fragmented, mostly spurred by donors' requirements and thus meant for external (the donors') consumption.

Because of the influence of an odd assortment of self-interested political allies of elected leaders, the government has become gridlocked, losing the support of the citizens. Meanwhile the security has deteriorated, the economy has taken a downturn, and the NUG has not been able to coalesce into a functional unified administration. The government comprises parts and pieces that are yet to be

assembled into a cohesive working machine. One of the negative consequences of the situation that may have long-term impact is the deepening polarization of the country along ethnic, sectarian, and factional lines. The practice of the appointment of officials on the basis of ethnic and factional quotas has undermined meritocracy in governance and seriously thwarted government effectiveness. If this continues, the country will become more and more divided.

Under such conditions, the most challenging issue is the rush of political elites to extend their patronage networks through posting their cohorts in key security positions at the expense of winning the peace. With the rise of the insurgency, some power brokers have managed to remobilize and rearm their militias under the guise of local anti-Taliban militia or the Afghan Local Police. These forces in certain areas have been involved in pillage and abuse of the population, further undermining the legitimacy of the state.

Now the Taliban have many weaknesses despite the enormous support they receive from Pakistani military and intelligence organizations. They are disfavored by the overwhelming majority of Afghans, and they are handicapped by the absence of a solid logistic system that stretches all the way to their bases in Pakistan. But they exploit the weaknesses of the government by using and thriving in the poorly governed space where the population sees intermittent protection from the police and few services from the government. There, the insurgents act with tactical agility, choosing the time and place for hitting individual government posts. All of these factors, coupled with insurgency-related violence and the inability of security forces to counter local criminals and drug lords, have led to a tremendous loss of public confidence.

These problems notwithstanding, the legitimacy of the Afghan government is helped by strong international

backing, particularly US support. Further, the absence of a viable alternative is another element of public acceptance of the NUG. But the NUG still needs to deal with a number of constitutional challenges in order to stay in power as a legitimate and viable government. The political deal that created this government expired on September 29. Under the terms of that deal, the government was supposed to implement electoral reforms and hold district council, provincial council, and parliamentary elections to allow a constitutional convention (a constitutional *Loya Jirga*) to be convened. The reform process has stalled, the current term of parliament has expired without new elections being held, and district boundaries have never been drawn. As the deadline came and passed without any hope of the terms of the political deal being implemented as designed, discussions among the political class in Kabul are increasingly turned toward alternative means of securing political order.

So far those discussions have focused on two alternatives: holding early presidential elections in the hope that a single figure with authority might emerge, and holding a "traditional" *Loya Jirga*—in other words a representative national assembly, but not one that is convened according to the explicit conditions in the constitution. Neither solution is optimal. Even if an early election is decided, given the lack of institutional reforms and the deterioration of security, it is not clear that this election would yield a clearer result than the previous one. Some form of representative assembly could be convened without elections, but its lack of constitutionality would limit the authority of its decisions, or at least make them easy to question. However, doing nothing to somehow extend the legitimacy of the NUG can result in unknown negative consequences.

But there is a major caveat: if the ongoing insurgency continues unabated, allowing no breathing space for major shifts in the structure of the government, it is hardly imaginable that a change in the government will win enough support. Since the Afghan electorate voted in 2014 for a five-year-term government, the NUG has constitutional legitimacy while the political deal as a structural arrangement expired. But the deal can be extended, revised, or dissolved until the promised constitutional *Loya Jirga* is convened and makes the final call.

Economy

Finally, the economic transition in Afghanistan suffers from a sharp economic downturn following the withdrawal of the foreign forces. The billions of dollars that were poured into Afghanistan in the presence of foreign forces created an economic bubble without providing an economic base for long-term self-reliance. The weak economy is one of the country's great vulnerabilities, as economic development is an essential element of sustainable security and stability. According to the World Bank assessment, the political and security situation has affected Afghanistan's economy much more deeply than anticipated. It sees the medium-term outlook as unfavorable. Although a mild recovery may come in 2016, the country is not expected to achieve self-reliance for many years. Therefore, tapping into Afghanistan's economic potential and building indigenous capacity to foster economic development should become an integrated part of a political strategy.

In the short term, measures are to be taken to mitigate the negative economic impact of the foreign military drawdown and dwindling foreign funds. As President Ashraf Ghani stated in the London Conference in December 2014, the priority should be a strong focus on the domestic private sector and on attracting foreign business by delivering

reforms aimed at improving the business climate in Afghanistan.

Long-term economic development in Afghanistan can be achieved through two major approaches: tapping into the national potential and resources; and regional connectivity and economic integration. Recent estimates are placing the value of Afghanistan’s untapped reserves of metals, gas, and hydroelectric energy at one trillion dollars. Afghanistan’s agriculture economy was one of the main sources of the country’s economy before it was heavily devastated during the war and before the explosion of illegal drug production. The development of the two sectors also requires the improvement of security and regional cooperation—both are interlinked. The diversification of transit routes—including the Zaranj-Chabahar route through Iran, the so-called Lapis Lazuli route through Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan to Georgia and Turkey, the US-supported Silk Route initiative, and the Chinese One Belt One Road scheme—as well as regional energy corridors such as the TAPI pipeline and CASA-1000 not only may present new opportunities for regional connectivity but also may create incentives for regional cooperation, facilitating the political settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan.

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Notes

Introduction

1. Part of this poem is often quoted to signify how the Afghans fight foreign invaders. It reads:

> When you're wounded and left on Afghanistan's plains,
> And the women come out to cut up what remains
> Jest roll to your rifle and blow out your brains
> An' go to your Gawd like a soldier.

2. Joseph Ferrier, *History of the Afghans* (London: J. Murray, 1858), 278.

3. Sir Winston Churchill, *The Story of the Malakand Field Force: An Episode of Frontier War* (London: Longmans, Green, 1898), 5–13.

4. Peter Paret et al., *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 841.

5. Khoshal Khan Khattak, *Dastarnama*: *A Classic Treatise on Norms and Practice of Leadership* (in Pashto) (Kabul 1967), 56.

6. Howard Hensman, *The Second Afghan War* (London: W. H. Allen, 1881), 329.

7. Some Western sources spell this as "Zambourak" and "Zambourek," which are not correct. The name is

taken from the Persian word *Zanbour*, meaning “wasp.”

8. Colonel Colombari, *Les Zemboureks—Artillerie de Campagne a Dromedaire* (Paris: Spectateur Militare Journal, 1853), 294–295.

9. Joseph Ferrier, *The History of the Afghans*, trans. William Jesse (London: John Murray, 1858), 313.

1. A Distinct Geography and a Turbulent History

1. Arnold J. Toynbee, *Between Oxus and Jumna* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 1–2.

2. Iqbal wrote in his poetry work *Javid Nama* in 1932:

“Asia is a body made of water and clay
In that body the Afghan nation is the “heart”
If it (the heart) is corrupt all Asia is corrupt
If it is dilated all Asia is dilated.”

آسیا یک پیکر آب و گل است
ملت افغان درآن پیکردل است
از فساد او فساد آسیا
از گشاد او گشاد آسیا

3. Thomas H. Holdich, *The Gates of India, Being an Historical Narrative* (London: MacMillan, 1910), 1–2.

4. Abul Fazl-i-’Allami, *Ain-i-Akbari* (The Institutes of Akbar), Nolakshor, India, 1310 Hijra (1899 AD), 2:192.

5. A mountain range Eratosthenes assumed extended from the western seas all the way to India in a straight line dividing Asia lengthwise into two parts, making one the northern part and the other the southern.

6. Eratosthenes, *Geographica*, fragments collected and translated with commentary and additional material by Duane W. Roller (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 42–43, 96, 100–101.

7. Ibid., 85.

8. William Smith, ed., *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography,* vol. 1 (Boston, 1870), 210–211.

9. Strabo, *Geography*, trans. Horace Leonard Jones (London: Harvard University Press, 1930), 15.2.1–2.

10. Ibid., 15.8–9. See also Horace Hayman Wilson, *Ariana Antiqua: A Descriptive Account of the Antiquities and Coins of Afghanistan* (London: East India Company, 1841), 120–122.

11. Aruzi-i-Samarqandi, a Persian poet and prose writer of the twelfth century who spent most of his time in Khorasan and Transoxiana locates Laghman (east of Kabul) as part of Sind (India) and a district of Ghazna. See Nizami-i Aruzi-i Samarqandi, *Chahar Maqalah* (Four Discourses), ed. Mohammad Qazwini, 12th ed. (Tehran: Sada-i-Ma'asir, 2003), 29.

12. *Babur Nama*, trans. Annette S. Beveridge (Lahore: Sange Meel, 1987), 202.

13. *Archeological Recollections,* vol. 4 (Shiraz, 1959), cited in Abdul Hai Habibi, unpublished notes on Afghan and Afghanistan, and author's conversation with him in the 1960s. Abdul Hai Habibi, Afghan and Afghanistan. See also www.alamahabibi.com/English%20Articles/Afghan_and_Afghanistan.htm.

14. Vahara Mihtra, *Brihat Samita*, trans. N. Chindambaram (Matura: South Indian Press, 1884), 75, 96–97.

15. Thomas Watters et al., eds., *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, vol. 2 of Royal Asiatic Society (London, 1906), 298–303.

16. *Memoires sur les Contrées Occidentales*, translated from Sanskrit to Chinese in 648 by Hioun-Thsang and from Chinese to French by M. Stanislas Julien, vol. 2 (Paris, 1858), 198–200.

17. Anonymous author from Jawzjan (circa 983 AD), *Hudud al-Alam* (The Limits of the World) (Tehran), 379.

18. Al-Biruni, Abu Rayhan, *Albiruni's India*, trans. and ed. Edward Sachau (Delhi: Rupa Publishers, 2005), 1:279.

19. Ibn Battuta, *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta*, ed. Ross E. Dunn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 175, 178, 184, 186.

20. Saifi Herawi, Saif ibn Mohammad ibn Ya'qub al-Herawi, *Tarikh Nama-i-Herat*, ed. M. Zubair Siddiqi (Calcutta, 1943), 111, 188–192, 201–207, 213–221.

21. H. W. Bellew, *An Inquiry into the Ethnography of Afghanistan* (Karachi: Indus Publications, 1977), 3–4.

2. Highlights of the Past

1. Ali Ahmad Jalali, *Motli'ye Tarikh-I Afghanistan Az Negah-I Askari* (The Study of Afghanistan History from a Military Perspective), vol. 1 (Kabul: Defense Press 1964), 38–40.

2. G. H. Rawlinson, *Bactria: The History of a Forgotten Empire* (London: Probsthain, 1912), 19–20.

3. "Bactria" is the Grecized form of the Persian name of "Bakhtri." Its earlier form, mentioned in Zend Avesta, is "Bakhdi," which is glorified in Avesta as "*Bakhdhim sriram erdhvo drafsham*" (Bakhdi the beautiful, crowned with banners). This ancient Avestan appellation later transformed into "Balkh."

4. Thomas H. Holdich, *The Gates of India, Being an Historical Narrative* (London: MacMillan, 1910), 73.

5. Vandidad, Fragard I, lists the names of Airyana-Vaeja (Sources of Oxus and Jaxartes), Bakhdhi (Balkh), Nisa (a land between Bakhdhi and Mouru [Merv]), Haroyu, Hariva (Herat), Haraqaiti (Helmand), Haetumat (Sistan), Vaekereta (Kabul), Khuneta (Kandahar), Mouru (Merv), Soghdha (trans-Oxus), Varena (Kirman), Hapta-Hindu (India), and others as part of the sixteen chosen Avestan

lands. See *Avesta, the Religious Book of the Persees*, trans. Arthur Henry Bleeck, 3 vols. (Hartford: Printed for Muncherjee Hormusjee Cama by Stephen Austin, 1864), 3–12. (This is a translation from the German translation by Professor Spiegel.)

6. Wilhelm Geiger, *Civilization of the Eastern Iranians in Ancient Times with an Introduction on the Avesta Religion*, vol. 2 (London: Henry Frowde, 1886), 85–110.

7. Ibid., 90.

8. Strabo, *Geography*, trans. Horace Leonard Jones (London: Harvard University Press, 1930), 11.11.1; see also Rawlinson, *Bactria*, 2.

9. *Rigveda*, 1.130.8. All Rigveda references are cited in Romesh Chunder Dutt, *Ancient India 200 B.C.–800 A.D.* (London: Longmans, Green, 1893), 13–14; see also Geiger, *Civilization of the Eastern Iranians*, 1:19–20.

10. *Rigveda*, hymns 18, 33, and 83.4–8.

11. Harold Lamb, *Cyrus the Great* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 295.

12. Benjamin Ide Wheeler, *Alexander the Great—the Emerging of the East and West in Universal History* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1900), 397.

13. Quintus Curtius Rufus, *The History of Alexander*, trans. John Yardley (New York: Penguin, 1984), 5.9, 3–8.

14. Alexander, like many ancient Greeks, believed that there is a great outer sea beyond India where the world ends.

15. Quintus Curtius, *The History of Alexander*, 6.4.1.

16. Strabo, *Geography*, 11.8.9.

17. The detachment included Companions, the mounted javelin-men, the archers, the Agrianes, and the Amyntas and Coenus battalions.

18. Quintus Curtius, *The History of Alexander*, 7.3.22–25.

19. Arrian, *Anabasis—The Campaigns of Alexander*, trans. Aubrey de Selincour (New York: Penguin, 1971),

3.29.

20. Strabo, *Geography*, 11.88.4.

21. Rawlinson, *Bactria*, 42.

22. Arrian, *Anabasis*, 4.18–19.

23. Ibid., 4.19–20; Quintus Curtius, *The History of Alexander*, 8.4.23–26.

24. Quintus Curtius, *The History of Alexander*, 8.4.23–26.

25. Arrian, *Anabasis*, 4.22.

26. Quintus Curtius, *The History of Alexander*, 8.5.4–5.

27. Plutarch, *The Life of Alexander the Great*, trans. John Dryden (New York: Modern Library, 2004), 12–13.

28. Ibid., 128–148.

29. Diodorus Siculus, The *Historical Library of Diodorus the Sicilian*, in 15 books, to which are added the fragments of Diodorus and those published by J. Valesius, I. Rhodomannus, and F. Ursinus, trans. G. Booth, esq. 2 vols. (Pemberton Row, London: M'Dowall, 1814), bk. 17, chap. 8, pp. 228–229.

30. Arrian, *Anabasis*, 4.18.

31. Quintus Curtius, *The History of Alexander*, 8.5.4.

32. Ibid., 6.6.14–15.

33. Plutarch, *The Life of Alexander the Great*, trans. John Dryden (New York: Modern Library, 2004), 55.

34. Rawlinson, *Bactria*, 51.

35. Wheeler, *Alexander the Great*, 495–496.

36. A. B. Bosworth, *Alexander and the East—The Tragedy of Triumph* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), preface.

37. Wheeler, *Alexander the Great*, 500–501.

38. Justin, *History of Justin*, trans. John Clarke (London: R. Raixes, 1790), 41.4. Translation of *Justini, Historiae Phillippicae*.

39. Strabo, *Geography*, 11.11.1.

40. William W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 122.

41. Justin, *History of Justin*, 41.4.

42. V. V. Barthold, *The History of Turks in Central Asia*, trans. Ghafar Hosseini (in Persian) (Tehran: Tus Publishers, 1997/1376), 52–53.

43. The *Cataphract* was a form of armored heavy cavalry utilized in ancient warfare by a number of peoples in Western Eurasia and the Eurasian Steppe.

44. George B. Rawlinson, *The Sixth Great Oriental Monarchy or the Geography, History and Antiquities of Parthia* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1872), 404.

45. Ibid., 159–166.

46. Hans Delbruck, *History of the Art of War*, vol. 1, *Warfare in Antiquity* (1900; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1990), 561.

47. Edward Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 5 (Harrington, DE: Delmarva, 2013), chap. 51, pt. 9.

48. *Ghazwa* meant military expeditions or raiding with a new connotation of religious warfare, often led by the Prophet Mohammad.

49. Estakhri, *Al-Masalik al-mamalik* (Leiden, 1927), 39–40.

50. Robert Payne, *The History of Islam* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1995), 146.

51. Al-Baladhuri, Abul Abbas Ahmad ibn Jabir, *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*, trans. Philip Khuri Hitai (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2002), 151, 205, 261, 292–293, 297.

52. Mohammad ibn Jarir Tabari, *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, trans. Abul Qasim Payendah, 6th ed., vol. 11 (Tehran: Asateer, 2004), 4692, 4706–4709.

53. Anonymous (circa 1062 AD), *Tarikh-i Sistan*, ed. Mohammad Taqi Bahar (Tehran, 1930), 268.

54. Tabari, *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, 13:5707–5708.

55. Such characterization of *'ayyaran* abounds in Persian folk tales, for example, in Sadiduddin Mohammed

‘Awfi, *Jawami’-al-Hekayat wa Lawami’-al-Rawayat*, ed. Ja’far Sh’ar (Tehran: Scientific and Cultural Publication Company, 1985), 259, 359–361.

56. Kazimini, Kazim, *‘Ayyaran: Ba Wizhagi haye Pahlawani az Tarikh-i-Ejtema’i wa Qawmi Iran* (‘Ayarran—Their Specialized Feats in the National and Social History of Iran) (Tehran: Maihan, 1970), 307–317.

57. Anonymous, *Tarikh-i Sistan*, 29.

58. Gardizi, Abu Sa’id Abdul-Hay Dhahhak, *Zayn al-Akhbar*, ed. Abdul Hay Habibi (Tehran: Armaghan, 1884), 305.

59. Ibn Athir, Ali ‘Izz al-Din al-Jazari, *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, trans. Slayed Hosseini Rohani, 3rd ed., vol. 10 (Tehran: Asateer 2003), 4383.

60. W. Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, 3rd ed., ed. C. E. Bosworth (London: Luzac, 1968), 218–219; C. E. Bosworth, *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 4, *From the Arab Invasion to the Seljuks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), chap. 3, “The Tahirids and Saffarids,” p. 125.

61. Lord Kinross, *The Ottoman Centuries, the Rise and Fall of the Turkish Empire* (New York: Morrow Quill, 1977), 34.

62. Jaywant D. Joglekar, *Decisive Battles India Lost, 326* BC *to 1083* AD, 1st Marathi ed. (Lexington, KY: Somaiya, 2012), 7.

63. K. M. Panikar, *Problems of Indian Defense*, cited in Joglekar, *Decisive Battles India Lost*, 12.

64. Vincent A. Smith, *The Oxford History of India from the Earliest Times to the End of 1911* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1919), 220.

65. Minhaj-u-Seraj Jawzjani, *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* (Calcutta, 1864), 115–119.

66. Joglekar, *Decisive Battles India Lost*, 46.

67. Mohammad Qasim Hindu Shah, *Tarikh-i Fereshta* (Calcutta: Newalkishore Press, 1874), 57–58.

68. Jawzjani, *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, 119–120.

69. Smith, *Oxford History of India*, 220.

70. ‘Alauddin ‘Ata Malik Juwayni, *Tarikh-i, Jahan-Gusha*, ed. M. M. Qazwini (Leyden: E. J. Brill, 1912), 1:82: آمدند و کندند و کشتند و بردند و رفتند (they came and they destroyed, they burned and they slew, they trussed up the loot and they left).

71. *The Secret History of the Mongols*, adaptation by Paul Kahn (Boston: Cheng & Tsui, 1998), 114–115.

72. Juwayni, *Tarikh-i, Jahan-Gusha*, 1:21–23. See also Ata-Malik Juwayni, *Tarikh-i, Jahan-Gusha*, trans. and ed. A. A. Boyle (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958), 30–32.

73. Timothy May, *The Mongol Art of War* (South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military, 2007), 28–30.

74. Marco Polo, *The Travels*, trans. Ronald Latham (London: Penguin, 1958), 100–101.

75. Jawzjani, *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, 2:104.

76. C. C. Walker, *Jenghiz Khan* (London: Luzac, 1939), 82; see also Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, 404.

77. Juwayni, ‘Alauddin ‘Ata Malik, *Tarikh-i, Jahan-Gusha*, ed. M. M. Qazwini (Leiden: Brill, 1912), 1:23.

78. Mohammad ibn Ahmad Nesawi, *Sirat-i Jalaluddin Mungaberti* (Tehran, 1987), 107.

79. Ibid., 117.

80. Jeremiah Curtin, *The Mongols—A History* (Conshohocken, PA: Combine Books, 1996), 127.

81. Juwayni, *Tarikh-i, Jahan-Gusha*, 1:106–107; Nesawi, *Sirat-i Jalaluddin Mungaberti*, 117–118.

82. Jawzjani, *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, 2:28.

83. Hamdullah Mustawfi, *The Geographic Part of the Nuzhat al-Qulub*, trans. G. Le Strange (Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 1919), 14: 146–159.

84. Rashiduddin Fazlullah, *Jami'u t-Tawarikh*, ed. Mohammad Roshan Mustafa Mousavi, (Tehran: Alburz Publisher, 1994), 1:591–592.

85. Harold Lamb, *Tamerlane, Conqueror of the Earth* (New York: Bantam, 1955), 42.

86. Nizamuddin Shami, *Zafarnama*, ed. Felix Tauer, vol. 1 (in Persian) (Prague: Oriental Institute, 1937), 142–144.

87. Ibid., 94.

88. Beatrice Forbes Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 21.

89. Ibid.

90. The list shows the tribal militias as: Khalil, 500 horse and 6,500 foot; Khattak, 200 horse and 4,000 foot; Daudzai, 3,000 horse and 37,000 foot; Safi, 100 horse and 1,400 foot; Afridi, 500 horse and 10,500 foot.

91. Sir Jadunath Sarkar, *A Short History of Aurangzeb, 1618–1707* (Calcutta: Oriental Longman, 1979), 122.

92. دا منصبونه دا انعامونه
واړه زندۍ دی واړه دامونه

93. Rustam-ul-Hokama, *Rustam-u-Tawarikh*, ed. Mohammad Moshiri (Tehran: Sherkat-e-Sahami Kitab ha-i-Jibi Co., 1965), 115–118; see also Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 190–191; and Ralph Magnus and Eden Naby, *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 28–29.

94. Tadeusz Jan Krusinski, *The Chronicles of a Traveler or a History of the Afghan Wars with Persia in the Beginning of the Last Century from Their Commencement to the Accession of Sultan Ashraf*, trans. George Mitford, Esq. (London: James Ridgway, 1840), 58.

95. Sir John Malcolm, Major General, *The History of Persia from the Most Early Period Containing an Account*

of the Religion, Government and Character of the Inhabitants of That Kingdom (London: John Murray, 1829), 421.

96. Abdullah Razi Hamadani, *Tarikh-i Iran* (History of Iran) (Tehran), 570–571; Sir Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia*, vol. 2 (London: McMillan, 1915), 314–315. Sykes writes, “Many years ago, when camped on the site of this battle I read how the Persians sumptuously armed and splendidly horsed with saddles and stirups mounted with gold laughed to scorn the ragged sun-scorched Afghans. My thoughts went back to the battles fought by the last Sasanian monarchs against the Arabs and I was stuck by the similarity of the circumstances and conditions.”

97. William Floor, *The Afghan Occupation of Safavid Persia, 1721–1729, Based on the Accounts of the Persian-Based Dutch East India Company*, compiled, annotated, and translated by William Floor, Association pour l’avancement des etudes iraniennes (Louvain: Peeters, 1998), 87.

98. Colonel Colombari, *Les Zemboureks—artillerie de campagne à dromedaire* (Paris: Spectateur Militare Magazine, 1853), 294–295.

99. Jonas Hanway, *An Historical Account of the British Trade over the Caspian Sea with a Journal of Travels from London through Russia into Russia*, vol. 2 (Memphis, TN: General Books, 2010), 153 (originally published in London in 1753).

100. Sayed Jamaluddin Afghani, *Tatmat ul-Bayan fi Tarikh al-Afghan*, trans. Mohammad Amin Khogiani (Peshawar: Saba, 1994), 30 (originally published by Government Press in Kabul in 1839).

101. Krusinski, *Chronicles of a Traveler*, 95.

102. Sir Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia*, 2:316.

103. Floor, *The Afghan Occupation of Safavid Persia*, 87–88.

104. Shaykh Mohammad Ali Hazin, *Tarikh-i Ahwal wa Tazkerah-i Mawlana Mohammad Ali Hazin*, ed. Abd-Jani Ardakani (Bombay: Shahabi Press, 1905), 51–52; Krusinski, *Chronicles of a Traveler*, 121–123.

105. Krusinski, *Chronicles of a Traveler*, 125.

106. Hanway, *An Historical Account*, 4:94. Hanway traveled to Persia at that time and visited the Nader camp in 743. See also Joseph Ferrier, *The History of the Afghans*, trans. William Jesse (London: John Murray, 1858), 95.

107. Hanway, *An Historical Account*, 4:95.

108. Ibid., 4:168–169.

109. G. Jailani Jalali, ed., *Nama-ye Ahmad Shah Baba Banam-e Sultan Mustafa Thales Osmani* (Ahmad Shah's Letter to the Ottoman Sultan Mustafa III) (Kabul: Afghanistan History Society, 1967), 42–43, 52–53.

110. Ibid., 15–16.

111. Jean Law, *Memoires*, 194–195, cited in Sir Jadunath Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, 3rd ed., vol. 2 (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1964), 210–211.

112. Imamuddin Husseini, *Tarikh-i Hussein Shahi* (1798), ms. Afghanistan Academy of Sciences; Faiz Mohammad Kateb, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, vol. 1 (Kabul: Government Press, 1911), 56.

113. Cited in Ganda Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani: Father of Modern Afghanistan* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1959), 344.

114. James Grant Duff, *A History of the Mahrattas* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1826), 1:357–358; 3:427–428.

115. James Grant Duff, *History of the Marathas*, 4th ed., vol. 1 (Bombay, London: Times of India Office, 1878), 599.

116. Rohilkand was a region in the northwestern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh that was named after Afghan highlanders, known as Rohilla (mountaineers) who had

settled in the area during the reign of Shah Jahan (1628–1658) and later. The area included the cities of Bareily, Moradabad, Rampur, Bijore, Farahabad, Shahjahanpur, and others. Their major leaders in the middle of the eighteenth century were Najib ud-Daulah, the governor of Saharanpur, Hafiz Rahmat Khan, Dundi Khan, and Ahmad Khan Bangash.

117. Kasi Raj Pundit, *An Account of the Last Battle of Panipat and of the Events Leading to It*, trans. James Brown in English, ed. George Rawlinson (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 26.

118. Ibid., 40.

119. Ibid., 25.

120. Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, 221.

121. James Grant Duff, *A History of Mahrattas*, vol. 2 (1826; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 148.

122. Joglekar, *Decisive Battles India Lost*, 92; Jalali, *Nama-ye Ahmad Shah*, 65–76; Mahmud al-Husseini al-Munshi, *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi (1753)*, rotograph of the manuscript, ed. Sayed Muradov, vol. 2 (Moscow: Nauka Press, 1974), 965–966.

123. Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani*, 256–257; Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, 234; I. M. Reisner, *Razviti Fiodalizma u abrazavani Gosodrstva Afgantsef* (The Development of Feudalism and the Establishment of the Afghan State) (Moscow, 1954), 284.

124. Kasi Raj, *Account of the Last Battle*, 17–19.

125. Ibid., 19–20.

126. Duff, *A History of Mahrattas*, 2:149.

127. Uday S. Kalkarani, *Solstice at Panipat 14 January 1761* (Pune, India: Mula Mutba, 2011), 201, cited in *Bhaosaheb Bakhar* (Maratha account of the Battle of Panipat, 1761).

128. Kasi Raj, *Account of the Last Battle*, 40.

129. Mir Ghulam Ali Azad Bilgrami, *Khizanah-i-'Amirah* (Kabul Public Library, n.d.), 109; Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, 1:25.

130. George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England through the North Part of India, Kashmir, Afghanistan and Persia and into Russia by the Caspian Sea*, vol. 2 (London: East India Company, 1798), 70.

131. Mohan Lal, *Life of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2004), 144–145.

132. Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, 1:143.

3. The Great Game and the British Invasion of Afghanistan

1. The term is often attributed to Arthur Conolly (1807–1842), an intelligence officer of the British East India Company's 6th Bengal Light Cavalry. The term was later widely used by the British novelist Rudyard Kipling. It was also introduced into the mainstream parlance in the study of the history and geopolitics of that time.

2. The Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 settled the colonial disputes of Britain and Russia by delineating their spheres of influence in Persia, barred both countries from interference in Tibet, and recognized Britain's influence in Afghanistan.

3. Sir Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia*, vol. 2 (London: McMillan, 1915), 420.

4. John William Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, vol. 1 (London: Richard Burlington, 1851), 143–146.

5. Lieutenant Arthur Conolly, *The Journey to the North of India, Overland from England through Russia, Persia and Afghanistan*, vol. 2 (London: Richard Bentley, 1834), 305–306.

6. Sir Henry Durand, *The First Afghan War and Its Causes* (London: Longmans Green, 1879), 32–35.

7. Shah Shuja et al., *Waqi'at-e Shah Shuja* (Hidden History of Shah Shuja), part 2, ed. Muhammad Hussein Herati (Kabul: Afghanistan History Society, 1954), 96–98. The three-part history covers the life experiences of Shah Shuja (thirty-five anecdotes). The first and second parts were written by Shah Shuja and the third by his close aide and secretary, Muhammad Hussain Herati. See also Faiz Mohammad Kateb, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, vol. 1 (Kabul: Government Press, 1911), 120–124.

8. Alexander Burnes, *Cabool: Personal Narrative of a Journey to, and Residence in That City* (Karachi, 1986), 77–84 (originally published in London in 1841 by John Murray).

9. Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, 1:154.

10. Mr. Ellis to Lord Palmerstone: *Listed Papers Relating to Persia and Teheran*, November 13, 1835, cited in ibid., 1:154–155.

11. Joseph Ferrier, *The History of the Afghans*, trans. William Jesse (London: John Murray, 1858), 220–221.

12. Major General Sir Vincent Eyre, *The Kabul Insurrection of 1841–42* (London: Wm. H. Allen, 1879), 37.

13. Mohan Lal, *Life of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul*, vol. 1 (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1846), 260–263. Sykes, *A History of Persia*, 1:403.

14. Sykes, *A History of Persia*, 1:403.

15. Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, 1:216.

16. Sayed Jamaluddin Afghani, *Tatmat ul-Bayan fi Tarikh al-Afghan*, trans. Mohammad Amin Khogiani (Kabul, 1939), 65.

17. Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, 1:135.

18. Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, 1:222.

19. See *Falsification of Diplomatic Documents: The Afghan Papers, Reports and Petitions of the New Castle Foreign Affairs Association* (London: Effingham Wilson, Royal Exchange, 1860), 5.

20. The Secret Committee of the Court of Directors was the channel through which the ministry communicated with the Governor General.

21. Eyre, *The Kabul Insurrection of 1841–42*, 35.

22. For the text of the Tripartite Treaty, see Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, 1:319–323; see also Lal, *Life of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul*, 1:239–241.

23. The text of the Shimla Manifesto (the Declaration of War). See also Lal, *Life of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul*, 1:379–387.

24. H. G. Keene, *History of India from the Earliest Times to the End of the Nineteen Century*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1906), 143.

25. H. M. Durand (Mortimer Durand), *The Life of Major-General Sir Henry Durand*, vol. 1 (London: W. H. Allen, 1883), 40.

26. Shah Shuja's forces consisted of six battalions of infantry, two irregular cavalry regiments, and one battery of horse artillery numbering some 6,000 strong.

27. The breakout of the forces was as follows:

- Prince Timur's troops under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Wade: 4 guns and 4,840 troops, including 1,000 cavalry.
- The Sikh contingent with the Prince: 12 artillery pieces; 6,000 troops including 1,067 cavalry, a total of 6,140 with a grand total on the Peshawar-Kabul axis of 10,880 troops and 16 guns.
- Bengal and Bombay Columns: 50 guns, 800 artillery, 3,630 cavalry troopers, 7,910 infantry, 350 sappers and miners, 340 pioneers, and 13,030 total troops. Shah Shuja's force numbered 6,070, with a total of 19,100 troops on the Kandahar-Kabul axis. On both axes there were 29,986 troops.
- Additionally a 3,050 force of infantry, artillery, and pioneers was left at Bucker.

- Major General Duncan's force at Firozpur numbered some 5,000 infantry, cavalry, and artillery forces. This added up to a grand total of 40,186 troops with 20,000 troops, including the British in Afghanistan and 70 to 80 guns.
- Additionally the Sikhs were committed to maintain a 15,000-strong observation army in Peshawar.
- All added up to over 55,000 combat troops.

28. Lal, *Life of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul*, 1: 235–236.

29. Burnes, *Cabool*, 293.

30. Lal, *Life of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul*, 1:239–241.

31. Sir Winston Churchill, *The Story of the Malakand Field Force: An Episode of Frontier War* (London: Longmans, Green, 1898), 5–13.

32. Josiah Harlan (1799–1871) was an American adventurer who traveled to India, Afghanistan, and Punjab, where he became involved in local politics and factional military actions, eventually winning the title "Prince of Ghur" in perpetuity for himself and his descendants in exchange for military aid to the locals. Rudyard Kipling's short story "The Man Who Would Be King" is believed to be partly based on Harlan.

33. Lal, *Life of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul*, 1:241.

34. Letter from *Captain Abbott's Journal, dated 7th November 1841*, dispatched from Gundaamack (Gandamak), published in *The First Afghan War 1839–1842, Dispatches from the Front Line*, ed. J. B. Gardner (London: Parchment, 2012), 161.

35. Sita Ram, *From Sepoy to Subehdar*, ed. James Lunt, 1st English ed. (1873; Delhi: Vikas, 1970), 89.

36. T. A. Heathcote, *The Afghan Wars, 1839–1919* (London: Osprey, 1980), 32–33.

37. Ferrier, *The History of the Afghans*, 312.

38. In British India, the *maund* was first standardized in the Bengal presidency in 1833, where it was set equal to 100 troy pounds (82.28 pounds).

39. Major W. Hough, *A Narrative of the March and Operations of the Army of the Indus in the Expedition into Afghanistan in the Years 1838–1839* (Calcutta: W. Thacker, 1840), 8.

40. Durand, *Life of Major-General Sir Henry Durand*, 91–92.

41. Sita Ram, *From Sepoy to Subehdar*, 88.

42. Ibid., 36–37.

43. Munshi Atta Mohammad Shikarpuri, *Tazah Nawa-ye Ma'arek* (Karachi: Sindh Adabi Board, 1959), 386–387; Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, 1:142.

44. Shah Shuja et al., *Waqi'at-e Shah Shuja*, 115.

45. Ibid., 116–117; Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, 1:143.

46. In Afghanistan, grapes are grown in long rows of piled-up dirt, which may be four or five feet tall. Grape trellises are not as common as in the West. The piled up dirt hardens and provides ready fighting positions for snipers.

47. Lieutenant Holdsworth letter to father, July 24, 1839, at Ghazni, in Gardner, *The First Afghan War*, 64.

48. Captain Henry Havelock, *Narrative of the War in Afghanistan, 1838–39*, vol. 2 (London: Henry Colburn, 1840), 64–66.

49. Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, 1:150–151.

50. Lieutenant Holdsworth letter to father, 65.

51. This gate today is locally called Darwaza-i-Bahlol, or the Bahlol Gate, for its proximity to the shrine of an ancient saint named Bahlol.

52. Lal, *Life of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul*, 2:221–223.

53. Captain James Outram, *Rough Notes of the Campaign in Sinde and Afghanistan in 1838–39* (Bombay:

American Mission Press, 1849), 95. This is the captain's personal journal.

54. Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, 1:445.

55. Durand, *Life of Major-General Sir Henry Durand*, 177.

56. Ibid., 178.

57. Captain Havelock, who served as aide de camp to General Cotton and participated in the battle, provides vivid details of the struggle of Sale with the Afghan fighter. See Havelock, *Narrative of the War in Afghanistan, 1838–39*, 2:79–80.

58. Ferrier, *The History of the Afghans*, 329.

59. Shikarpuri, *Tazah Nawa-ye Ma'arek*, 395–396.

60. Ram, *From Sepoy to Subehdar*, 98.

61. Lal, *Life of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul*, 2:229–230.

62. Ram, *From Sepoy to Subehdar*, 99.

63. Ben Macintyre, *The Man Who Would Be King: The First American in Afghanistan* (New York: Farrar Straus, Giroux, 2004), 246.

64. Hough, *Narrative of the March and Operations*, appendix 8.

4. The First Anglo-Afghan War

1. General Orders by the Commander of the Forces, Headquarters, Meerut, November 22, 1839, by the Right Honorable the Governor General, Camp Somalka, November 19, 1839. This document is found in Major W. Hough, *A Narrative of the March and Operations of the Army of the Indus in the Expedition into Afghanistan in the Years 1838–1839* (Calcutta: W. Thacker, 1840), appendix 5, pp. 556–559.

2. Ibid., 271–272; see also Henry Marion Durand, *The First Afghan War and Its Causes* (London: Longmans, Green, 1879), 247–248.

3. John William Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, vol. 1 (London: Richard Burlington, 1851), 553–554.

4. Mohan Lal, *Life of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul*, vol. 2 (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1846), 352.

5. Ibid., 349–354.

6. Mohammad Ghulam Kohistani Ghulami, *Jang-Nama* (Kabul: Government Press, n.d.), 20.

چو بر شه نباشدسر گیر ودار
چرا تن به بیهوده سازیم خوار
کزین بعد بر قوم نصرانیان
بکوشیم فالجمله اندر زبان
که این اهل کفر است و ما اهل دین
نه بینیم شان دیگر الا به کین
بمیریم یا کشته سازیم شان
به خون غم آغشته سازیم شان
بجز این سخن هیچ دیگر مباد
ستانیم سر یا رود سر به باد

7. Faiz Mohammad Kateb, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, vol. 1 (Kabul: Government Press, 1911), 158.

8. Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, 1:562.

9. Ibid., 1:563–564.

10. Hamid Kashmiri, *Akbar-Nama*, trans. Mohammad Sharif Janan (Quetta: Rafiqi Research Institute, 2011), 144–148. This is a translation into Pashto.

11. Lal, *Life of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul*, 2:354–355. See also Kashmiri, *Akbar-Nama*, 150–151.

12. Munshi Atta Mohammad Shikarpuri, *Tazah Nawa-ye Ma'arek* (Karachi: Sindh Adabi Board, 1959), 456–459.

13. Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, 1:158–159.

14. Sir W. Macnaghten to Mr. Robertson, January 12, 1841, cited in Sir Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia*, vol. 2 (London: McMillan, 1915), 20–21.

15. Durand, *The First Afghan War and Its Causes*, 325–326.

16. “Dan to Beersheba” occurs nine times in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and is used to designate the area settled by the tribes of Israel. During the negotiations following World War I, the British proposed that this area be set aside from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire as a League of Nations mandate, which became British Palestine.

17. Lal, *Life of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul*, 2:313.

18. Kashmiri, *Akbar-Nama*, 159.

19. Lal, *Life of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul*, 2:321.

20. According to Patrick Macrory, “Alexander Burnes seems to have been one of the leaders in lechery.” Macrory, *Retreat from Kabul* (1966; Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2002), 122n.

21. Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, 1:149–150.

22. The more conservative rural country to the east described Kabul pejoratively as a promiscuous place for women. There was a saying at the time, as reported by Shikarpuri (*Tazah Nawa-ye Ma’arek*, 478), noting that “no Kabul women is without a lover as no wheat flour of Peshawar is without corn,” that is, not pure wheat:

زن کابل بی یار نیست آرد پشاور بی جوار نیست

In 1832, during Alexander Burnes’s visit to the household of Sardar Sultan Mohammad Khan in Peshawar (brother of Amir Dost Mohammad), who was the governor of Peshawar under the Sikh court of Lahore, the Sardar’s children recited the same couplet to him as a pejorative reference to Kabul. See Alexander Burnes*, Bokhara: Travels into Bokhara: Being an Account of a Journey from India to Cabool, Tartary, and Persia*, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1834), 100.

23. Shikarpuri, *Tazah Nawa-ye Ma'arek*, 486.

24. Shah Shuja et al., *Waqi'at-e Shah Shuja* (Hidden History of Shah Shuja), ed. Muhammad Hussein Herati, Afghanistan History Society (Kabul, 1954), 124–125. The three-part history covers the life experiences of Shah Shuja (35 anecdotes). The first and second part was written by Shah Shuja and the third by his close aide and secretary, Muhammad Hussain Herati.

25. Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, 1:556.

26. Ferrier, *The History of the Afghans*, trans. William Jesse (London: John Murray, 1858),
331.

27. Sir Robert Warburton, *Eighteen Years in the Khyber, 1879–1898* (London: John Murray, 1900), 3.

28. Lieutenant Vincent Eyre, *The Military Operations at Kabul Which Ended in the Retreat and Destruction of the British Army, January 1842, with a Journal of Imprisonment in Afghanistan*, 2nd ed. (London: John Murray, 1843), 3.

29. Shikarpuri, *Tazah Nawa-ye Ma'arek*, 306–307.

30. Eyre, *Military Operations at Kabul*, 10.

31. Archibald Forbes, *The Afghan Wars, 1839–1842 and 1878–1880* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892), 69.

32. Durand, *The First Afghan War and Its Causes*, 361.

33. H. G. Keene, *History of India from the Earliest Times to the End of the Nineteen Century*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: John Grant 1906), 154.

34. Eyre, *Military Operations at Kabul*, 20.

35. Ibid.

36. Lal, *Life of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul*, 2:401–410.

37. Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, 2:18.

38. Kashmiri, *Akbar-Nama*, 179–180.

39. Lal, *Life of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul*, 2:402–407.

40. Eyre, *Military Operations at Kabul*, 22.

41. Lady Sale, *A Journal of the Disasters in Afghanistan, 1841–42* (London: John Murray, 1944), 45.

42. Eyre, *Military Operations at Kabul*, 17.

43. Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, 1:162–163; Shikarpuri, *Tazah Nawa-ye Ma'arek*, 480–482; Shah Shuja et al., *Waqi'at-e Shah Shuja*, 133.

44. Kashmiri, *Akbar Nama*, 160–161.

45. The Bibi-Mahru village still exists at the northeast bottom of the hill of the same name. Both the village and the hill (tapah) are commonly referred to as "Bemaru." The historical and official designation of the place is Bibi-Mahru, named after a distinguished Kabuli virgin who is buried there. The low hill overlooks the upscale Wazir Akbar Khan district of modern Kabul, which is named after Sardar Akbar Khan, the hero of the first Anglo-Afghan war, who presided over the Battle of Bibi-Mahru on November 1841, which became an important turning point in the war. British authors of the time and later wrote the name with different spellings, such as Beymaroo (Eyre and Duran), Behmaru (Sale), Beh-meru (Kaye), and Behmaroo (Forbes).

46. Eyre, *Military Operations at Kabul*, 34.

47. Sale, *Journal of the Disasters*, 119.

48. Four companies of Her Majesty's 44th under Captain Leighton, six companies of 5th Native Infantry under Lieutenant Colonel Oliver, six companies of 37th Native Infantry under Captain Kershaw, a squadron of the 5th Cavalry under Captain Bott, a squadron of irregular cavalry under Lieutenant Walker, 100 men of Anderson's Horse, one Horse Artillery gun, and 100 sappers.

49. Eyre, *Military Operations at Kabul*, 103; Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, 1:166.

50. Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, 1:166.

51. Ibid.; Eyre, *Military Operations at Kabul*, 104.

52. Eyre, *Military Operations at Kabul*, 104.

53. The British Brown Bess musket was accurate to 50 yards and effective to 150 yards. The range and accuracy of the locally manufactured *Jezails* differed with the maker, but they generally outranged the Brown Bess, and some of the rifled *Jezails* were effective out to 500 yards. Since the British fought in formation and the insurgents fought in groups, the small-arms battle was not so much about accuracy as long-range massed fire. The insurgents had the clear advantage there.

54. Sale, *Journal of the Disasters*, 125.

55. A square collapsing in on itself during battle was serious. The command group, the aid station, ammunition, and water points were within the square, and it was essential that the interior of the square remain hollow for quick movement.

56. Sale, *Journal of the Disasters*, 126.

57. Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, 2:87.

58. Sale, *Journal of the Disasters*, 132.

59. Eyre, *Military Operations at Kabul*, 122. See also Blackwood's *Edinburgh Magazine* 53 (January–June 1843), published in Edinburgh and London by William Blackwood and Sons.

60. Such as John Waller, *Beyond the Khyber Pass* (New York: Random House, 1990), 223.

61. Eyre, *Military Operations at Kabul*, 111.

62. Kashmiri, *Akbar-Nama*, 183–191.

63. Eyre, *Military Operations at Kabul*, 113–117.

64. Forbes, *Afghan Wars*, 91.

65. Unpublished correspondence of Sir W. H. Macnaghten, cited in Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, 2:105.

66. Durand, *The First Afghan War and Its Causes*, 372.

67. Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, 1:170.

68. Ibid., 1:168.

69. Macnaghten to Mohan Lal, December 21, cited in Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, 2:143.

70. Eyre, *Military Operations at Kabul*, 156.

71. Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, 1:172.

72. Makenzie letter to Lieutenant Eyre dated July 29, 1842, in Eyre, *Military Operations at Kabul*, 165–166.

73. Captain Lawrence letter to Major Pottinger dated May 10, 1842, in Eyre, *Military Operations at Kabul*, 173–179.

74. According to Mohan Lal, his actual head was never found. When a man came from Kabul and presented an account of his finding it and bringing it at great risk to India, it was merely to deceive and take money from Major Leech. Lal, *Life of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul*, 2:426.

75. Forbes, *Afghan Wars*, 48.

76. Eyre lists the elements as follows: one troop of horse artillery (90); the H. M.'s 44th foot (600); the 5th Light Cavalry (260); 5th Shah's Irregular Cavalry; Anderson's horse (500); Skinner's horse; one *resala* (70); the 4th Irregular Horse (70); mission escort, or body-guard (70); the 5th Native Infantry (700); the 37th Native Infantry (600); the 54th Native Infantry (650); the 6th Shah's Infantry (600); sappers and miners (20); the Shah's Sappers and Miners (240); half the mountain train (30). This totaled 4,500 fighting men and 6 horse artillery guns. The combat force included 690 Europeans, 970 native cavalry, and 2,840 native infantry.

77. As indicated in an account of the sole survivor, Doctor Brydon, who reported to the Jalalabad garrison. See Rev. G. R. Gleig, *Sales Brigade in Afghanistan with an Account of the Seizure and Defense of Jalalabad* (London: John Murray, 1845), 137–139.

78. Forbes, *Afghan Wars*, 113.

79. Sir Vincent Major General Eyre, *The Kabul Insurrection of 1841–42* (London: Wm. H. Allen, 1879), 269.

80. Eyre, *Military Operations at Kabul*, 221.

81. Ibid., 229–230.

82. Faiz Mohammad claims that the British troops emerged during the night through underground openings that were made under the north and south gates of the fort, thus leaving the gates closed. They launched their attack at dawn. Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, 2:178.

83. *Personal Narrative of the Campaign in Afghanistan, Sinde, Beloochistan*, and so on, detailed in a series of letters of the late Colonel William H. Dennie, CB, compiled and arranged by William Steele, in 1843, pp. 154–155.

84. Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, 2:343–344.

85. In my days at the Staff College Camberley, I learned that the regiment marks the anniversary of its action in Jalalabad with annual celebrations. The regiment was honored by Queen Victoria, who directed that it be made Light Infantry and carry the additional designation of “Prince Albert’s Own” and wear a badge depicting the walls with the word “Jalalabad.”

86. A popular line in Kabul at the time was:

سکه زد بر سیم وبرزر شاه شجاع ارمنی
نور چشم لات و برنس خاک پای کمپنی

“Coined money in gold and silver Shah Shuja the Armenian [Christian-infidel] / The eyesight [dear] of the Lott [Macnaghten] and Burnes, and the dust under the feet of the Company [British India].”

87. Shah Shuja et al., *Waqi’at-e Shah Shuja*, 143–144.

88. Rev. I. N. Allen, *Diary of a March through Sinde and Afghanistan with the Troops under Command of General Sir William Nott* (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1843), 272.

89. Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, 2:577.

90. Ibid., 2:679.

91. Eyre, *The Kabul Insurrection of 1841–42*, 307.

92. Sale, *Journal of the Disasters*, 430–437; Eyre, *The Kabul Insurrection of 1841–42*, 359–368.

93. Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, 2:627–629.
94. Lal, *Life of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul*, 2:495.
95. Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, 2:667.
96. Keene, *History of India*, 163.
97. Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, 2:670.

5. Geopolitical Changes in Central Asia Leading to the Second Anglo-Afghan War

1. Faiz Mohammad Kateb, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, vol. 2 (Kabul: Government Press, 1911), 200.
2. Joseph Ferrier, *The History of the Afghans*, trans. William Jesse (London: John Murray, 1858), 316–317.
3. Angus Hamilton, *Afghanistan* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 308–309.
4. General Staff India 1940, *Military Report, Afghanistan, Part I—History,* Ref. No. D. 46720, p. 30.
5. Major H. B. Lumsden, *The Mission to Kandahar with Appendices* (Calcutta: C. B. Lewis, Baptist Mission Press, 1860), 11–18.
6. Three infantry and one cavalry regiment in Balkh, two infantry and one cavalry regiment in Kandahar, and three infantry regiments in Kabul-Kohistan.
7. Ferrier, *The History of the Afghans*, 316–317.
8. Sayed Jamaluddin Afghani, *Tatmat ul-Bayan fi Tarikh al-Afghan*, trans. Mohammad Amin (Kabul: Khogiani, 1839), 105.
9. Joseph Davey Cunningham, *A History of the Sikhs from the Origin of the Nation to the Battles of Sutlej*, 2nd ed. (London: John Murray, 1853), 282–286.
10. Sir Henry Rawlinson, *England and Russia in the East: A Series of Papers on the Political and Geographical Conditions of Central Asia*, 2nd ed. (London: John Murray, 1875); the text of the convention is on page 384.

11. Ibid., the text of the treaty is on page 389.

12. George Douglas Campbell, Duke of Argyll, *The Eastern Question from the Treaty of Paris 1856 to the Treaty of Berlin in 1878, and to the Second Afghan War*, vol. 2 (London: Strahan, 1879), 226–227.

13. *Causes of the Afghan War, Being a Selection of the Papers Laid Before Parliament with a Connecting Narrative and Comment* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1879), 2–3.

14. Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, 2:246–247.

15. Rawlinson, *England and Russia in the East*, 273.

16. *Causes of the Afghan War*, 222–227, circular, St. Petersburg: November 21, 1864, signed by Gorchakov.

17. Ibid., 11–12.

18. Minutes by the Commander-in-Chief in India, Suggested by Sir M. Rawlinson's Memorandum on the Questions Connected with Central Asia, dated December 24, 1868, cited in Rawlinson, *Causes of the Afghan War*, 17.

19. Argyll, *Eastern Question*, 250.

20. Lord Roberts, Field Marshal, *Forty-One Years in India, from Subaltern to Commander-in-Chief*, vol. 2 (London: Richard Bentley and Sons, 1897), 74.

21. Sir Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia*, vol. 2 (London: McMillan, 1915), 100.

22. Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India*, 247.

23. John Dacosta, *A Scientific Frontier or the Danger of a Russian Invasion of India* (London: W. H. Allen, 1891), 10.

24. Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India*, 88–89.

25. Ibid., 99.

26. Archibald Forbes, *The Afghan Wars, 1839–1842 and 1878–1880* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892), 168; G. S. Chhabra, *Advance Study in the History of Modern India*, vol. 2, rev. ed. (New Delhi: Lotus Press, 2005), 396–397.

27. Victoria Schofield, *Afghan Frontier: At the Crossroad of Conflict*, rev. ed. (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 91.

28. Argyll, *Eastern Question*, 217.

29. The Congress of Berlin was a meeting of the European Great Powers and the Ottoman Empire in Berlin, held from June 13 to July 13, 1878. It was convened in the wake of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 in which Russia fought to end the Ottoman domination over the Slavic countries of the Balkans. On the basis of the Berlin Treaty, Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro were declared independent principalities while Russia kept South Bessarabia (a region covering modern Moldova and the northern and southern areas of Ukraine), which it had annexed during the war. Meanwhile the Bulgarian state was split into the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia, and both were given nominal autonomy under the control of the Ottoman Empire.

30. Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India*, appendix V2.

31. *The Afghan War, a Speech Delivered in the House of Lords by the Right Honorable Viscount Cranbrook, Secretary of State for India on Monday, December 9th, 1878* (Westminster, London, December 1878), 26.

32. Hamilton, *Afghanistan*, 311–312.

33. *Sharh-i-Qawa'ide Piadagan-i-Paltan* شرح قواعد پیادگان پلتن (Description of Infantry Battalion Drills), trans. Qazi Abdul Qader Khan (printed in the Kabul Government press under the supervision of Mohammad Sadeq Khan).

34. Intelligence Branch Army Headquarters, India, *The Second Afghan War, 1878–80, Abridged Official Account* (London: John Murray, 1908), appendix, pp. 833–835.

35. Howard Hensman lists the types and number of different rifles entered in the government books as having been issued to the Afghan troops. They included:

5,000 English Sniders; 15,000 English Enfields; 1,200 English Rifled Carbines; 1,400 English Brunswick Rifles; 1,000 English Tower Muskets; 1,045 English Cavalry Pistols; 2,189 Kabuli Sniders; 8,212 Kabuli Enfields; 589 Kabuli Rifled Carbines; 453 Kandahar Enfields; 516 Herati Enfields; 1,553 various kinds of cavalry (double-barreled and so on); 1,418 smoothbores (probably many Tower muskets); 1,300 Flint Muskets. All these add up to 49,875. Hensman, *The Afghan War of 1879–80* (London: W. H. Allen, 1881), 327.

36. The disposition of the army in 1877 was as follows: Kabul: 14 infantry regiments and 1 cavalry squadron, 18 artillery batteries (total 10,010 troops); Jalalabad: 3 infantry and 3 cavalry regiments, and 2 artillery batteries (total 3,200 troops); Sherabad: 5 infantry regiments, 2 artillery batteries (total 3,220 troops); Kurram: 3 infantry and 2 cavalry regiments, 4 artillery batteries (total 3,190 troops); Kandahar: 4 infantry and 6 cavalry regiments, 3 artillery batteries (total 6,370 troops); Herat: 17 infantry regiments, 10 artillery batteries (total 11,220 troops); Maimana: 4 infantry regiments and 4 artillery batteries (total 2,840 troops); Balkh: 12 infantry and 6 cavalry regiments, 10 artillery batteries (total 11,820 troops).

37. According to British calculations before the war, the whole revenue of Afghanistan was only 7,982,390 rupees, of which 1,921,195 rupees were spent on the army.

38. Hensman, *Afghan War of 1879–80*, 332.

39. Intelligence Branch Army Headquarters, India, *The Second Afghan War*, 13.

40. Ibid., 21–22.

41. Colonel H. B. Hanna, *Afghan War, 1878–79–80: Its Causes, Its Conduct and Its Consequences*, vol. 2 (Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1899), 61.

42. Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India*, 147.

43. Earlier in March 1857 the Spingawai Pass was reconnoitered by a British mission to Afghanistan under Major Lumsden, who traveled from Kurram through the Spingawai and Shutur-Garden Passes to Kabul. Lumsden, *The Mission to Kandahar*, 3.

44. The Teri Mangal village was the last staging area of the Pakistan-based Mujahedin forces for cross-border operations in the Kurram Valley sector during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979–1989).

45. Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India*, 136.

46. Ibid., 137–138.

47. Ibid., 145.

48. Sir George Forrest, *The Life of Lord Roberts, K.G., V.C.* (London: Cassel, 1914), 65.

49. Ibid., 76.

50. Sher Ali, "Correspondence on Afghanistan," 12, cited in Forrest, *Life of Lord Roberts*, 79.

51. From General Kauffman to the Amir of Afghanistan dated December 25, 1878 (13th Muharram, 1296), cited in Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India*, 475–476.

52. From General Kauffman to the Amir of Afghanistan received at Mazar-i-Sharif on January 17, 1879, cited in ibid.

53. The Battle of Isandlwana on January 22, 1879, between the British Empire and the Zulu Kingdom in South Africa took place 11 days after the British initiated their invasion of Zululand. The battle marked one of the worst defeats in the British colonial wars when 20,000 Zulu fighters armed with primitive weapons met a column of 1,800 British and colonial troops equipped with state-of-the-art technology, including Martini-Henry breech-loading rifles, two seven-pounder guns, and a rocket battery. In spite of their technological disadvantage, the Zulu fighters overwhelmed the British force, killing 1,300 troops while their losses included about 1,000 killed. The

battle resulted in the failure of the first British invasion of the Zululand.

54. Hanna, *Afghan War*, 2:342–343.

55. Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India*, 178–179.

56. The Corps of Guides was a regiment of the British India serving in the North West Frontier, which comprised partly infantry and partly cavalry troops. The corps evolved into the Frontier Force Regiment in the twentieth century.

6. The Second Phase of the Second Anglo-Afghan War

1. Yaqub Ali Khafi, *Padshahan-i Muta'khirin-i Afghanistan*, vol. 2, 2nd ed. (Kabul: Maiwand, 1998), 503.

2. Intelligence Branch Army Headquarters, India, *The Second Afghan War, 1878–80, Abridged Official Account* (London: John Murray, 1908), 184.

3. According to *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, they were offered their two-months' pay. Faiz Mohammad Kateb, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, vol. 2 (Kabul: Government Press, 1911), 352.

4. This was related to me in the early 1960s in Kabul by the son of one of the soldiers who participated in the event.

5. Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, 2:352.

6. Now revolved into today's Pakistan Frontier Force, the Corps of Guides of the Victorian era was an elite force of the British Indian Army.

7. Queen Victoria's Corps of Guides was a famous unit of the British Army of India that was raised in Peshawar among the Pashtun tribesmen. It is today the Frontier Force of Pakistan.

8. The uprising in Kabul on November 2, 1841, fell on the seventeenth of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the rebellion in 1879 took place on the sixteenth of Ramadan.

9. Intelligence Branch Army Headquarters, India, *Second Afghan War*, 216.

10. Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, 2:354.

11. Ibid., 2:355.

12. Khafi, *Padshahan-i Muta'khirin-i Afghanistan*, 2:506.

13. Excerpts from the letter are cited in Tony A. Heathcote, *The Afghan Wars, 1839–1919* (London: Osprey, 1980), 118.

14. Lord Roberts, Field Marshal, *Forty-One Years in India, from Subaltern to Commander-in-Chief* (London: Richard Bentley and Sons, 1897), 231–232.

15. A sizeable part of the Ardal regiments moved to Maidan and Wardak and were integrated into the tribal *lashkars* under General Mohammad Jan Khan. They participated in the general attack on the British garrison at Sherpur in December 1879.

16. Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, 2:355.

17. Khafi, *Padshahan-i Muta'khirin-i Afghanistan*, 2:505.

18. Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India*, 281.

19. Ibid., 298–299.

20. Howard Hensman, *The Afghan War of 1879–80* (London: W. H. Allen, 1881), 204.

21. Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, 2:359.

22. Khafi, *Padshahan-i Muta'khirin-i Afghanistan*, 2:506.

23. Hensman, *Afghan War of 1879–80*, 245; Archibald Forbes, *The Afghan Wars, 1839–1842 and 1878–1880* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892), 257.

24. Major R. C. W. Mitford, *To Kabul with the Cavalry Brigade, a Narrative of Personal Experiences with the Force under General Sir F. S. Roberts G.C.B.* (London: W. H. Allen, 1881), 185.

25. Intelligence Branch Army Headquarters, India, *Second Afghan War*, 289.

26. Vartan Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), 55.

27. Forbes, *Afghan Wars*, 234.

28. Ibid., 262.

29. Hensman, *Afghan War of 1879–80*, 251.

30. Major General Sir Charles Metcalfe Macgregor, *War in Afghanistan, 1879–80*, ed. William Trousdale (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985), 139. This is a published version of Macgregor's personal diary.

31. Hensman, *Afghan War of 1879–80*, 249.

32. Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India*, 304.

33. Ibid, 305.

34. Khafi, *Padshahan-i Muta'khirin-i Afghanistan*, 2:507.

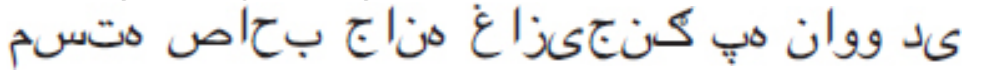
35. Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, 2:366.

36. Hensman, *Afghan War of 1879–80*, 392.

37. G. R. Elsmie, CSI, ed., *Field Marshal Sir Donald Stewart G.C.B., G.C.S.L, CLE., and an Account of the Life, Mainly in His Own Words* (London: John Murray, 1903), 329–333.

38. Euan Smith, *Brief Report of Intelligence Concerning the Force of the Enemy Opposed to Us at the Battle of Ahmad Khel, as Taken from the Prisoners on the Night of the Action, 19th April, 1880*, in Intelligence Branch Army Headquarters, India, *Second Afghan War*, 890–891.

39. Sahib Jan is featured in folk songs of his homeland even today, as people in Ghazni and Muqur honor his heroism and sacrifice in the battle of Shahjui. One song says, "O, Sahib Jan the ghazi, come back, there is again enemy to fight in your home"



40. Ahmad Khel was the name of a *karez* (underground irrigation tunnel) at the eastern limits of the Gul Koh spur where the actual battle was fought. Locally the area

located in the Ergatu plain east of Qara-Bagh is known as the Mullah Noh Baba plain, which takes its name from the shrine of a religious figure.

41. The line of quarter columns is an advance formation of a regiment or battalion where companies are formed in columns parallel to one another, which shortens the depth and widens the frontage.

42. Hensman, *Afghan War of 1879–80*, 395.

43. Case-shot, or canister, is a kind of antipersonnel ammunition used in cannons. It was similar to the naval grapeshot, but fired smaller and more numerous balls.

44. Hensman, *Afghan War of 1879–80*, 397.

45. Elsmie, *Field Marshal Sir Donald Stewart*, 333.

46. Hensman, *Afghan War of 1879–80*, 398.

47. Cited in Heathcote, *Afghan Wars*, 141.

48. Rudyard Kipling, *The Drums of the Fore and Aft* (New York: Brentano's Publishers, 1898).

49. Elsmie, *Field Marshal Sir Donald Stewart*, 333.

50. Hensman, *Afghan War of 1879–80*, 399.

51. Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India*, 312.

52. This included 11,500 in Kandahar and its line of communication with India, 20,000 in Kabul or in its immediate vicinity, 15,000 securing the line between Jalalabad and Peshawar through the Khyber Pass, and 8,500 held the Kurram Valley.

53. Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India*, 315.

54. Intelligence Branch Army Headquarters, India, *Second Afghan War*, 389–390. In his autobiography, Abdur Rahman Khan records a different text for his response: "In reference to your enquiries as to how I left Russia, I left it with the permission of the Viceroy, General Kaufmann, and the Russian Government. My only intention in doing so was to help my nation in much perplexity and trouble. With compliments, etc." Munshi Sultan Muhammad Khan, *The Life of Abdur Rahman, the*

Amir of Afghanistan, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1900), 192.

55. Intelligence Branch Army Headquarters, India, Second Afghan War, 389–390.

56. Khan, *Life of Abdur Rahman*, 1:194–195.

57. This section on the Battle of Maiwand is mostly based on Ali Jalali's paper in Pashto presented at a conference in Bonn, Germany, marking the 120th anniversary of the Battle of Maiwand, and Jalali and Grau, "Expeditionary Forces, Superior Technology Defeated—The Battle of Maiwand," *Military Review*, May–June 2001.

58. Leigh Maxwell, *My God—Maiwand: Operations of the South Afghanistan Field Force, 1878–1880* (London: Leo Cooper, 1979), 92–93.

59. Ibid., 74.

60. Brian Robson, *The Road to Kabul: The Second Afghan War, 1878–1881* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1986), 224.

61. Maxwell, *My God—Maiwand*, 78–83.

62. *Private Journal of Henry Francis Brooke, Late Brigadier General Commanding 2nd Infantry Brigade, Kandahar Field Force, from April 22 to August 16, 1880* (Dublin: William Curwen, 1880), 114.

63. Robson, *The Road to Kabul*, 228, states that there were actually 30 guns.

64. The Kabuli, Herati, and Kandahari regiments were named after the cities in which they were originally raised—Kabul, Herat and Kandahar. Over time, their ranks were filled with recruits from all over Afghanistan, but the regiments retained these designations.

65. Maxwell, *My God—Maiwand*, 98; Intelligence Branch Army Headquarters, India, *Second Afghan War*, 696.

66. As described by Mirza Mohammad Akbar, pay clerk of Ayub Khan's Kandahari regiment in Intelligence Branch Army Headquarters, India, *Second Afghan War*, 696.

67. Hensman, *Afghan War of 1879–80*, 324.

68. Ibid., 197.

69. Intelligence Branch Army Headquarters, India, *Second Afghan War*, 499–501.

70. Almost all British sources call the village "Mondabad," which is incorrect.

71. This village is recorded as "Khig" in British sources, which is incorrect.

72. Macgregor, *War in Afghanistan*, 217.

73. Their white garment symbolized the shroud, meaning they were ready to fight until death. Such devoted groups, known as *kafan poshan*, or "shroud wearers," were often seen in the Anglo-Afghan battles.

74. Maxwell, *My God—Maiwand*, 130.

75. This is an Afghan eyewitness account recorded by Khafi, *Padshahan-e Motaakherine-e Afghanistan*, 2:551. See also the account of the pay clerk of Ayub Khan's Kandahari regiments recorded in annex 28 of Intelligence Branch Army Headquarters, India, *Second Afghan War*, 696.

76. One of the couplets says in Pashto: "If you fail to be martyred at Maiwand, by God, my love, you will live only a disgraceful life." Malala's grave is now a shrine in her native Khig.

77. Khafi, *Padshahan-i Muta'khirin-i Afghanistan*, 2:550–552.

78. General Burrows Report, *London Gazette*, November 1880.

79. General Staff India 1940, *Military Report (Classified), Afghanistan, Part I–History,* Ref. No. D. 46720, p. 62; Intelligence Branch Army Headquarters, India, *Second Afghan War*, 526–528.

80. *Private Journal of Henry Francis Brooke*, 142.

81. Major Ashe, ed., *Kandahar Campaign, Officers Engaged Therein* (London: David Bogue, 1881), 75.

82. Rudyard Kipling, *The Works of Rudyard Kipling* (Denmark: Wordsworth, 1994), 437.

83. The principal gates were the Kabul Gate on the east, the Eidgah Gate on the north, the Herat Gate to the west, and the Shikarpur Gate on the south. The two minor gates included the Bar Durrani Gate on the east and the Top-Khana Gate on the north.

84. *Private Journal of Henry Francis Brooke*, 133.

85. Ali Ahmed Jalali and Lester W. Grau, *The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahedin Tactics in the Soviet Afghan War* (Quantico, VA: United States Marine Corps Studies and Analysis Division, 1997), 34–38.

86. Ashe, *Kandahar Campaign*, 166.

87. Ibid., 159.

88. *Private Journal of Henry Francis Brooke*, 124.

89. Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India*, 354–355.

90. Ibid., 355.

91. Ibid.

92. Forbes, *Afghan Wars*, 324.

93. H. G. Keene, *History of India from the Earliest Times to the End of the Nineteen Century*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1906), 302.

94. This is originally quoted by J. Clark in *British India and England's Responsibilities* (Swan Sonnenschien and Co. Ltd, 1902) and later is widely cited by others including Robert Johnson in *The Afghan Way of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 137, and in Stephen Tanner's *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the War against the Taliban* (Da Capo Press, 2003), 217.

7. A Period of Uneasy Peace and the Third Anglo-Afghan War

1. Munshi Sultan Muhammad Khan, ed., *The Life of Abdur Rahman, the Amir of Afghanistan*, vol. 1 (London:

John Murray, 1900), 217.

2. Ibid., 251; Amir Abdur Rahman, *Taj-u-Tawarikh*, vol. 1 (Kabul, 2011), 244.

3. Rahman, *Taj-u-Tawarikh*, 1:255–257.

4. Faiz Mohammad Kateb, *Seraj u-Tawarikh*, vol. 3, pt. 1 (Kabul: Government Press, 1911), 234–235.

5. Sayed Askar Mousavi, *The Hazaras of Afghanistan—An Historical, Economic and Political Study*, trans. Assadullah Shefayee (Tehran, 2000), 164–165. This text is a translation into Persian.

6. Mohammad Ishaq Akhlaqi, *Hazara dar Jarayan-i Tarrikh* (Hazaras in the Course of History), vol. 2 (Tehran, 2001), 138–139.

7. Faiz Mohammad Kateb, *Seraj-el-Tawarikh*, ed. M. Sarwar Mawlayee, addendum to vol. 3 (Kabul: Amiri Publishers, 1390/2011), 296–297, 301, 365.

8. Rahman, *Taj-u-Tawarikh*, 2:417–418.

9. W. K. Fraser-Tytler, *Afghanistan: A Study of Development in Central Asia and South Asia*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 188.

10. General Staff India, Military Report Afghanistan (Classified), Part—I History, 1940, Ref. No. D. 48720, Copy No. 379, pp. 70–71.

11. Rahman, *Taj-u-Tawarikh*, 1:273–275.

12. At the death of the amir, the regular army consisted of 80 infantry battalions, 40 cavalry regiments, 100 artillery batteries, and 4,000 household troops. The overall strength of the army was 90,000.

13. Khan, *Life of Abdur Rahman*, 283.

14. Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj-el-Tawarikh*, addendum to vol. 3, p. 309.

15. U. V. Gankovsky, ed., *Istoriya Vorozhoniekh Sil Afganistana, 1747–1977* (The History of Armed Forces of Afghanistan, 1747–1977) (Moscow, 1985), 65.

16. Angus Hamilton, *Afghanistan* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 318.

17. Rahman, *Taj-u-Tawarikh*, 2:334.
18. Frank Martin, *Under the Absolute Amir* (London: Harper & Brothers, 1907), 234–238.
19. Hamilton, *Afghanistan*, 320–321.
20. British Indian Army Intelligence Branch, *Military Report on Afghanistan (Classified) Compiled in the Division of the Chief of Staff of Army Headquarters of India* (Simla, 1906), pp. 191–196.
21. Martin, *Under the Absolute Amir*, 220–221.
22. Rahman, *Taj-u-Tawarikh*, 334.
23. Ibid., 270.
24. This time revolutionary upheavals took place in Russia (1905), in Persia (1905), and in Ottoman Turkey (1908).
25. Abdul Hay Habibi, *Junbesh-i-Masroutiat dar Afghanistan* (The Constitutional Movement in Afghanistan) (Kabul: Ministry of Information and Culture, 1985), 12–24.
26. Faiz Mohammad, *Seraj-el-Tawarikh*, vol. 4, pt. 3, p. 103.

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27. The Entente (alliance) powers included the United Kingdom, British dominions, France, Italy, Russia, Japan, Serbia, Montenegro, Romania, Belgium, Portugal, Greece, and others. The United States joined the alliance in 1917.

28. The Center Powers grouped the German Empire, Austria-Hungry, the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria, and some smaller nations.

29. Tony A. Heathcote, *The Afghan Wars, 1839–1919* (London: Osprey, 1980), 167.

30. Ibid., 169; see also Brian Robson, *Crisis on the Frontier—The Third Afghan War and the Campaign in Waziristan, 1919–20* (Brimscombe Port, UK: Spellmount, 2004), 8.

31. Viceroy to Secretary of State, No. 298-S, 11 March 1919-CP/19, cited in Robson, *Crisis on the Frontier*, 9.

32. Viceroy to Secretary of State, No. 572-S, 5 May 1919-CF/b. No. 523, cited in ibid, 11.

33. Leon Poulada, *Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, 1919–1929* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 46.

34. Rhea Talley Stewart, *Fire in Afghanistan, 1914–1929* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 47.

35. This was a contingency that the British feared might happen. Army Headquarters, *The Third Afghan War, 1919* (Calcutta: Government of India, 1926), 26.

36. Viceroy to Secretary of State, March 6, 1919, No. 579-S-CP/10. N0.522, cited in Robson, *Crisis on the Frontier*, 16.

37. Army Headquarters, *Third Afghan War, 1919*, 22–29.

38. Ibid., 29–30.

39. Ibid., 22–25.

40. A repeating rifle is a single-barreled rifle containing multiple rounds of ammunition in an attached or internal magazine that feeds the barrel by means of a manual mechanism that loads the next cartridge mechanically.

41. George Molesworth, *Afghanistan 1919, an Account of Operations in the Third Afghan War* (New York: Asia

Publishing House, 1962), 25–26.

42. Army Headquarters, *Third Afghan War, 1919*, 16.

43. A division consisted of three infantry brigades, each composed of one British and three Indian infantry battalions. Other elements in the division included a squadron of Indian cavalry, one field artillery brigade (two 18-pounder batteries and one 4.5-inch howitzer battery), one Mountain (pack) artillery brigade (two batteries of 2.75-inch guns), two companies of machine guns (16 guns each), two companies of sappers and miners, one pioneer battalion, one divisional signal company, a divisional ammunition column, and some auxiliary units.

44. The Lewis gun was a World War I–era light machine gun of American design and widely used by the British army. It continued in service with a number of armed forces through to the end of the Korean War (1950–1953). With an effective range of 800 meters, the gas-operated weapon could fire 500 to 600 rounds per minute.

45. Army Headquarters, *Third Afghan War, 1919*, 19–20.

46. Dispatch by General Charles Munro on the Third Afghan War, Simla, cited in Robson, *Crisis on the Frontier*, 13.

47. Molesworth, *Afghanistan 1919*, 27.

48. The British colonial administrative system in the North West Frontier was divided into an area bounded by an administrative border where the area was governed with a lighter administrative footprint, beyond which the tribal belt, up to the political border with Afghanistan, was given greater tribal autonomy.

49. Molesworth, *Afghanistan 1919*, 40–46.

50. Ibid., 53.

51. Stewart, *Fire in Afghanistan*, 51.

52. Ibid., 59.

53. Ibid., 53–54.

54. Mir Ghulam Mohammad Ghobar, *Afghanistan dar Massir-i-Tarikh* (Afghanistan in the Course of History), 4th

ed. (Kabul, 1989), 760.

55. Stewart, *Fire in Afghanistan*, 59.

56. General Staff India 1940, *Military Report (classified), Afghanistan, Part I—History*, Ref. No. D. 46720, p. 85.

57. Ibid.

58. Army Headquarters, *Third Afghan War, 1919*, 43.

59. Heathcote, *Afghan Wars*, 188.

60. Stewart, *Fire in Afghanistan*, 64.

61. Robson, *Crisis on the Frontier*, 34.

62. Doctor Abdur Rahman Zamani, *Baznegari Dawra-e-Amani wa Tawte'haye Englis* (A Review of the Amanullah Period and the British Conspiracies) (Jalalabad: Muska Publishers, 2013), 104–107.

63. Army Headquarters, *Third Afghan War, 1919*, 89.

64. Ibid., 25.

65. Marshal Shah Wali Khan, *Yad-dasht Ha-i-man* (My Notes and Remembrance) (Kabul: Government Press, n.d.), 10–11.

66. Yar Mohammad Khan Waziri, *Da Afghanistan da Khpalwaki aw Jihad Tarikh* (The History of Afghanistan Jihad and Deliverance), 3rd ed. (Peshawar: Danesh, 2007), 46–47.

67. Khan, *Yad-dasht Ha-i-man*, 19–20.

68. Author conversation with the late G. J. Jalali, who participated in the operation in Thal. He later described the course of the battle in an Afghan National Radio interview, May 1974.

69. Army Headquarters, *Third Afghan War, 1919*, 57.

70. Author's interview in Kabul 1964 with General Abdul Qayum Khan Paghmni, who commanded the Afghan artillery at Thal in 1919.

71. Army Headquarters, *Third Afghan War, 1919*, 61.

72. Molesworth, *Afghanistan 1919*, 120–121.

73. Some contemporary Wazir accounts list 55 posts captured by the tribesman in the frontier belt from

Miranshah to the Zhob Valley. Waziri, *Da Afghanistan da Khpalwaki aw Jihad Tarikh*, 67–82.

74. T. R. Moreman, *The Army in India and the Development of Frontier Warfare, 1849–1947* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 104.

75. It was named as Fort Sandimen in the colonial era. In 1976 the Pakistani government changed the name to Zhob, and it is still called by that name.

76. The official British account put the number of Afghans who attempted to escape at 200. But Afghan sources and the count of Afghans who fought to the death and those who were wounded and captured indicate that the number may have been far lower.

77. Author's interview in Kabul in 1966 with the Afghan colonel Ahmad Shah Khan, a close family member of the Afghan commander Yusuf Shah Khan, who fought in Spin Boldak.

78. Army Headquarters, *Third Afghan War, 1919*, 104.

79. The Alamo, a famous fort near San Antonio, Texas, in the United States, was the scene of a gallant defense by a small body of devoted patriots against an overwhelming Mexican army under President General Santa. During a 13-day siege (February 23–March 6, 1836) all of the Texas defenders fought to the last man. Their sacrifice inspired many Texans and adventurers from the United States to join the Texas army, which defeated the Mexican army at the Battle of San Jacinto less than two months later (April 21, 1836).

80. کلای جدید مشرف، یکی پراته شهیدان وربانډی اوری انوار

81. Amir to Viceroy, June 11, 1919: text in Viceroy to Secretary of State, No. 881-S, June 15, 1919–CF 10, No. 804, cited in *Crisis on the Frontier*, 129.

82. The text of the Treaty of Rawalpindi, August 8, 1919 (11 Ziqada 1337 Hijra).

83. See Michael Barthop, *The North-West Frontier—British India and Afghanistan, a Pictural History, 1839–1947* (Dorset, UK: Blandford Press, 1982), 138.

84. Moreman, *Army in India*, 115.

85. Molesworth, *Afghanistan 1919*, vii.

86. Robson, *Crisis on the Frontier*, 140.

8. Afghanistan under King Amanullah and the Civil War

1. Summary of Events in Afghanistan (classified), August 8, 1919, to June 1, 1920, compiled by the General Staff, India, C. R. Case No. 8620 (Dehli: Government of India Press, 1921), 15.

2. Ibid., 16.

3. Author's notes from speaking to three retired Afghan generals in Kabul in 1968. See also General Staff India 1940, *Military Report (Classified), Afghanistan, Part I—History*, Ref. No. D. 46720, pp. 266–267.

4. General Staff India Report (classified), Summary of Events in Afghanistan, June 1, 1920, to July 1, 1922, Case No. 25/Books M.O.3 (Delhi: Government Press, 1923), 9.

5. These items included 4,354,962 rounds of .303 Mark VII rifles, 15,000 Russian rifles with 15 million rounds, 10,000 French Lebel rifles, 7,500 MLE Rifles (ex-Russian), 4,500 five-shot Russian rifles, 3,000 SMLE rifles (ex-India), 2,000 Mannlicher rifles (.311) and 4,727,800 rounds, 1,000 Italian (.202) rifles, 40 rifles (.303), and two million rounds. General Staff India 1940, *Military Report (Classified), Afghanistan, Part I—History*, 270.

6. Two Italian armored cars; eight Italian and three French artillery batteries; three German, one French, one Polish, and two Russian airplanes; and five French light tanks.

7. In the late 1960s I was commissioned by the Afghan army to collect the old military hardware to be displayed

at a newly established military museum. Among the items I identified and placed in the museum were samples of World War I–vintage Italian armored cars, French tanks, British Hind aircraft, and an assortment of small arms.

8. General Staff India 1940, *Military Report (Classified), Afghanistan, Part I—History*, p. 139.

9. Enver Pasha, an exiled former Ottoman Turkish minister, joined and led the anti-Soviet insurgency known as Basmachis to unite the numerous guerrilla groups under his own command and mount a coordinated offensive against the Bolsheviks in order to realize his pan-Turkic dreams. After a number of successful military operations, he managed to establish himself as the rebels' supreme commander and turned their disorganized forces into a small but well-drilled army. His command structure was built along German lines, and his staff included a number of experienced Turkish officers.

10. Rhea Talley Stewart, *Fire in Afghanistan, 1914–1929* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 208.

11. *Sovetsko-Afganskii konfliki 1925–1926 g iz-za ostrova Urta-Tugai* (Soviet-Afghan Conflict in 1925–1926 for Urta-Tugi Island), trans. Harold S. Orenstein (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate, 1988).

12. General Staff India 1940, *Military Report (Classified), Afghanistan, Part I—History*, p. 118.

13. The text of the treaty signed in Kabul by Mahmud Tarzi, Afghanistan Foreign Minister, and Henry Dobbs, Envoy Extraordinary and Chief of the British Mission to Kabul, on November 22, 1921 (30 Aqrab 1300 Hijri Shmassi).

14. General Staff India 1940, *Military Report (Classified), Afghanistan, Part I—History*, p. 142.

15. Stewart, *Fire in Afghanistan*, 210.

16. Unpublished notes of my father, the late Professor G. J. Jalali, who served as the director of education of the

greater Paktia in the Amanullah government.

17. General Staff India 1940, *Military Report (Classified), Afghanistan, Part I—History*, pp. 153–154.

18. Ibid., 157–158.

19. Summary of Events in Afghanistan (classified) from July 1, 1927, to June 30, 1928, compiled by the General Staff, Case No. 26341 (Simla: Government of India Press, 1928), 16.

20. Stewart, *Fire in Afghanistan*, 457–460.

21. Xiao Wei Bond, Curator, India Office Private Papers. www.bl.uk; http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/untoldlives/2012/08/what-was-lawrence-of-arabia-doing-in-afghanistan-.html.

22. Mir Ghulam Mohammad Ghobar, *Afghanistan dar Massir-i-Tarikh* (Afghanistan in the Course of History), 4th ed. (Kabul, 1989), 790.

23. General Staff India 1940, *Military Report (Classified), Afghanistan, Part I—History*, p. 161.

24. Faiz Mohammad, *Kabul under Siege—Faiz Mohammad's Account of the 1929 Uprising*, translated, abridged, reworked, and annotated by R. D. McChesney (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1999), 55.

25. Ibid., 49.

26. Ibid., 59.

27. Stewart, *Fire in Afghanistan*, 561.

28. General Staff India 1940, *Military Report (Classified), Afghanistan, Part I—History*, p. 192.

29. Marshal Shah Wali Khan, *Yad-dasht Ha-i-man* (My Notes and Remembrance) (Kabul, n.d.), 46–47; Faiz Mohammad, *Kabul under Siege*, 88.

30. Faiz Mohammad, *Kabul under Siege*, 85.

31. The Decision of the Jirga recorded by Yar Mohammad Khan Waziri. See Yar Mohammad Khan Waziri, *Da Afghanistan da Khpalwaki aw Jihad Tarikh* (The History of Afghanistan Jihad and Deliverance), 3rd ed. (Peshawar: Danesh, 2007), 239–240.

32. Shah Wali Khan, *Yad-dasht Ha-i-man*, 86–100.
33. Stewart, *Fire in Afghanistan*, 209.

9. The Cold War and the Soviet Invasion

1. Yar Mohammad Khan Waziri, *Da Afghanistan da Khpalwaki aw Jihad Tarikh* (The History of Afghanistan Jihad and Deliverance), 3rd ed. (Peshawar: Danesh, 2007), 303–309.
2. Summary of Events in Afghanistan, July 1, 1930, to June 30, 1931, compiled by the General Staff, 32466, M.O.3-N (Simla: Government of India Press, 1931), 11.
3. Rhea Talley Stewart, *Fire in Afghanistan, 1914–1929* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 252–256, 305–306.
4. Summary of Events in Afghanistan, July 1, 1930, to June 30, 1931, 12.
5. Author's interview with the late General Ghulam Farouq, who was involved in the operations.
6. 36 antitank 75 mm guns, 48 Mountain 75 mm guns, 12 antiaircraft 37 mm guns, 12 antiaircraft 75 mm guns. The purchases also included 7.5 million rifle rounds and 150,000 mortar and artillery shells.
7. General Staff of India, 1940 *Military Report, Afghanistan (Classified), Part I—History*, Ref. No. D. 46720, p. 276.
8. Author's conversations in Kabul between 1965 and 1967 with senior Afghan Air Force General Abdul Razaq Khan and others.
9. In the late 1960s I had several Hind and Romeo planes restored for display at the Military Museum in Kabul.
10. U. V. Gankovsky, ed., *Istoriya Vorozhoniekh Sil Afganistana, 1747–1977* (The History of Armed Forces of Afghanistan, 1747–1977) (Moscow, 1985), 114.
11. General Staff India, 1940 *Military Report Afghanistan (Classified), Part I—History,* pp. 70–71. See

also General Staff India, Military Report Afghanistan (Classified), Part-I History (Simla: Government of India Press, 1925), 69.

12. George Mc Ghee, *Envoy to the Middle East: Advances in Diplomacy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 309.

13. General Mir Ahmad Mawlayee, *Khaterat–o-Tarikh* (History and Memoires), vol. 2 (Tehran: Hawa-e-Reza, 2002), 599.

14. The late General Ghulam Farouq Khan (chief of general staff, 1963–1973), who had served as Sardar Daud Khan's chief of staff in Jalalabad during the Kunar rebellion (1945–1947), told me in the late 1960s that the Sardar was seriously thinking of some kind of show of force across the border.

15. The Baghdad Pact was a defensive organization for promoting shared political, military, and economic goals founded in 1955 by Turkey, Iraq, Great Britain, Pakistan, and Iran. Similar to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), the main purpose of the Baghdad Pact was to prevent communist incursions and foster peace in the Middle East. It was renamed the Central Treaty Organization, or CENTO, in 1959 after Iraq pulled out of the pact.

16. Ludwig W. Adamac, *Afghanistan's Foreign Affairs to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974), 199.

17. Leon Poulada, *Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, 1919–1929* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 133.

18. George McGhee, *Envoy to the Middle East: Advances in Diplomacy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 304.

19. Poulada, *Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan*, 146.

20. Luis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 509.

21. Ibid., 510.

22. Ibid., 149.

23. In my conversation with King Zahir Shah in Rome in February 2002 about his refusal to promulgate the bill, His Majesty stated that since the law precluded the university students and teachers from participating in political parties, he saw the bill as unrealistic and sent it back for changes. This delayed the process. In essence, he said, he was not against signing the bill into law.

24. The Mitrokhin Archive is a collection of handwritten notes made secretly by KGB Major Vasili Mitrokhin during his 30 years as a KGB archivist in the foreign intelligence service and the First Chief Directorate. The 25,000 pages of files, covering operations from as far back as the 1930s, were brought to the West when Mitrokhin defected in 1992. Parts of the archive were published later. One of the publications, *KGB in Afghanistan*, details the clandestine operation of the KGB in Afghanistan since the early 1950s, including the recruitment of agents, assisting with the development of the PDPA Communist party, and the nature of KGB relationships with Afghan leaders in the 1980s.

25. Anthony Arnold, *Afghanistan's Two-Party Communism—Parcham and Khalq* (Stanford: Hoover Institute Press, 1983), 25.

26. Vasili Mitrokhin, *The KGB in Afghanistan*, ed. Christian F. Ostermann and Odd Arne Westad, Cold War International History Project, Working Paper No. 40, February 2002, vol. 1, pp. 24–26. See also Cristopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way—The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 386–387.

27. Mitrokhin, *KGB in Afghanistan*, 1:18, 21–23.

28. US Embassy Kabul to Department of State, Airgram A-77, "Afghanistan's Clerical Unrest; A Tentative Assessment," June 24, 1970, confidential.

29. Mohammad Najim Aria, *Mohammad Hashem Maiwandwal*, 4th ed. (Peshawar: Maiwand, 1999), 149–151.

30. Daud supported the insurgency in Pakistani Baluchistan, sheltering rebels and establishing training camps on Afghan territory.

31. Abdul Samad Ghaus, *The Fall of Afghanistan—An Insider Account* (Washington, DC: Pergamon-Brassy's, 1988), 127.

32. Ibid., 140.

33. Barnett Rubin, *Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 100; Ralph Magnus and Eden Naby, *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid* (Boulder: Westview, 2002), 62.

34. Abdul Samad Ghaus, *The Fall of Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1988), 171.

35. Ibid., 179.

36. Author's conversation with Ambassador Jalil Jamili in Washington 2003.

37. Diego Cordovez and Selig S. Harrison*, Out of Afghanistan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 15–16.

38. Ibid., 16.

39. Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih*, The Foreign Relations of Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 309–310.

40. Ghaus, *The Fall of Afghanistan*, 174–179.

41. Sultan Ali Keshtmand, *Yaddashtha-i-Siassi wa Roydadha-i-Tarikhi* (Political Recollections and Historical Events) (n.p.: Najib Kabir, 2002), vol. 2 (volumes 1 and 2 are printed together in one tome), 318–319.

42. Author's interview with several military officers and PDPA members, Kabul, July 1978. The contingency plans for a coup were also discussed in papers circulated by the PDPA in the summer of 1978.

43. Rodric Braithwaite, *Afghantsy, the Russians in Afghanistan, 1979–89* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 42.

44. Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way*, 386.

45. Cited in Diego Cordovez and Selig S. Harrison*, Out of Afghanistan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 27.

46. Louis Dupree, "Afghanistan under the Khalq," *Problems of Communism*, July–August 1979, 34.

47. Louis Dupree, *The Accidental Coup*, 5, cited in Cordovez and Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan*, 25.

48. Author's interview in Kabul in 1978 with several former officers of the Ministry of Defense; see also Alexander Lyakhovsky, *Tragediya i Dobelst Afgana* (The Afghan Tragedy and Valor) (Moscow, GPI "Iskon," 1995), 28–29.

49. Author's conversation with Major Fazal Rahman, the chief of operations of the Presidential Guard Brigade, who fought against the rebels.

50. Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way*, 386.

51. Arnold, *Afghanistan's Two-Party Communism*, 116–117.

52. M. A. Gareev, *Moya Poslednyaya Voina* (My Last War) (Moscow: INSAN, 1996), 23.

53. Arnold, *Afghanistan's Two-Party Communism*, 74.

54. Kryuchko, *Lichnoe Delo* (Personal Business), 1:192, cited in Rodric Brathwaite, *Afghantsy, the Russians in Afghanistan, 1979–89* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 42.

55. Lyakhovsky, *Tragediya i Dobelst Afgana*, 101.

56. Transcription of telephone conversation between Taraki and Kosygin on March 17 or 18, 1979, the Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, 2002. This author was part of a 52-member

group studying the Cold War documents that had been declassified.

57. Record of Meeting of A. N. Kosygin, A. A. Gromyko, D. F. Ustinov, and B. N. Ponomarev with N. M. Taraki, March 20, 1979, the Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, 2002.

58. Lyakhovsky, *Tragediya i Dobelst Afgana*, 76.

59. Author's interview with the leaders of the mutiny, Mohammad Ishaq (now lieutenant-general of the Afghan National Army) and Mohammad Yaqub (now brigadier general of the Afghan National Army), in Peshawar in 1981.

60. Author's interview with Colonel Abdur Rauf Safi, Peshawar, summer of 1984.

61. Mitrokhin, *KGB in Afghanistan*, 1:63–81.

62. Ibid., 1:86.

63. Braithwaite, *Afghantsy*, 76.

64. Mitrokhin, *KGB in Afghanistan*, 1:87–89.

65. They included Yuri Andropov, Andrei Gromyko, Mikhail Suslov, and Dmitriy Ustinov.

66. Lyakhovsky, *Tragediya i Dobelst Afgana*, 109–112.

67. Handwritten text of the Resolution. See also Lyakhovsky, *Tragediya i Dobelst Afgana*, 109–112.

68. Gregory Feiffer, *The Great Gamble, the Soviet War in Afghanistan* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 58.

69. Ibid., 61.

70. Lyakhovsky, *Tragediya i Dobelst Afgana*, 126–127.

71. Boris Gromov, *Ogranichennyy Kontingent* (Limited Contingent) (Moscow: Progress Press, 1994), 99.

72. Russian General Staff, *The Soviet Afghan War—How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, trans. and ed. Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 17.

73. Author's conversation in Kabul in December 1979 with officers of the Operation Department of the Afghan army general staff.

74. Author's conversation in January 1980 with Amanullah, a household tailor of the Amin family who was at the palace that day and fell ill like many others. He later witnessed the attack on the building in the evening. He was taken away with other noncombatants out of the palace and spent the night in the open outside the palace under the guard of Tajik-speaking Soviet soldiers.

75. Braithwaite, *Afghantsy*, 95.

76. Lyakhovsky, *Tragediya i Dobelst Afgana*, 136–137.

77. Mitrokhin, *KGB in Afghanistan*, 99–100.

78. Gromov, *Ogranichennyy Kontingent*, 87.

10. Soviet Occupation and the War of Resistance

1. Alexander Maiorov, *Pravda ob Afganskoy Voine* (Truth about the Afghan War) (Moscow: Pravo Chelaveka, 1996), 154.

2. Cristopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way—The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 407.

3. Maiorov, *Pravda ob Afganskoy Voine*, 92–93.

4. Andrew and Mitrokhin, *World Was Going Our Way*, 407–408.

5. Vasili Mitrokhin, *The KGB in Afghanistan*, ed. Christian F. Ostermann and Odd Arne Westad, Cold War International History Project, Working Paper No. 40, February 2002, vol. 1, pp. 24–26.

6. Ibid., 1:116.

7. Lester Grau, *Breaking Contact without Leaving Chaos–The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan*, Foreign Military Study Office, Fort Leavenworth, http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/withdrawal.pdf.

8. Russian General Staff, *The Soviet Afghan War—How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, trans. and ed. Lester W. Grau

and Michael A. Gress (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 18–28.

9. Boris Gromov, *Ogranichennyy Kontingent* (Limited Contingent) (Moscow: Progress Press, 1994), 184.

10. The Hezb-e Islami was split in two factions of the same name in 1980. The Jabha-e Mili Nejat-i-Afghanistan (National Liberation Front of Afghanistan, NLFA), Harakat-e Enqelb-i-Islami Afghanistan (the Islamic Revolutionary Movement of Afghanistan, IRMA), and the Etehad-i-Islami (Islamic Union, IU) were originally the names of alliances that rapidly broke up.

11. The Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) was maintaining liaison with the Afghan Mujahedin parties and assisted in the coordination of their activity. It also provided training and transferred internationally provided supplies to the Mujahedin groups. The ISI's Afghan Bureau met regularly with the military representatives of all parties to make joint decisions on planning, coordinating, and conducting military operations in Afghanistan. The ISI leadership was coordinating overall political issues with the leaders of the alliance. See Brigadier Mohammad Mohammad Yusaf and Mark Adkin, *The Bear Trap* (Lahore: Jang, 2002), 38–43 (originally published in London in 1992).

12. Tschanguiz Pahlavan, *Afghanistan:'Asr-e Mujahedin ve Baramadan-e Taleban* (The Era of Mujahedin and the Rise of the Taliban) (Tehran, 1999), 467.

13. Author's interview with the Wahdat party's senior political figure, Dr. Taleb, in Washington, April 1999. See also Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 141–142.

14. Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, 143–144. See also Jeans-Jose Puig, quoted in Bruce Amstutz, *Afghanistan: The First Five Years of Soviet Occupation* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 1986), 109–110.

15. Ali A. Jalali, “Fero-pashi Sakhtar-e Davlat der Afghanistan” (The Break-Up of the State Structure in Afghanistan), *Mehragan* (Summer 1998): 53–54.

16. Amstutz, *Afghanistan*, 109 and 359–360.

17. Diego Cordovez and Selig Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 67–70, 266–270, 384–387.

18. Yusaf and Adkin, *The Bear Trap*, 83.

19. Ken Silverstein, “Stingers, Stingers, Who’s Got the Stingers? We Gave Them to the Mujahedin. We Sold Them to Our Allies. Will They End Up Biting Us Back,” *Slate*, October 3, 2001.

20. Andrew and Mitrokhin, *World Was Going Our Way*, 416.

21. Yusaf and Adkin, *The Bear Trap*, 186. This claimed success ratio is one-third above the Soviet official figures for Soviet and Afghan total aviation losses during this period. Alexandr Lyakhovsky, *Tragediya i Dobelst Afgana* (Afghan Tragedy and Valor) (Moscow: GPI “Iskon,” 1995), Losses appendix.

22. Barnett Rubin, *Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 179.

23. Ibid., 81–82.

24. M. A. Gareev, *Moya Poslednyaya Voina* (My Last War) (Moscow: INSAN, 1996), 310–311.

25. Husain Haqani, *Pakistan between Mosque and Military* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), 193.

26. Yusaf and Adkin, *The Bear Trap*, 105. The breakdown of aid distribution was 18 to 20 percent for Hekmatyar, 18 to 19 percent for Rabbani, 17 to 18 percent for Sayaf, 13 to 15 percent for Khales, 13 to 15 percent for Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi, 10 to 11 percent for Gailani, and 3 to 5 percent for Mujaddedi.

27. Based on author's observations in Peshawar in the early 1980s.

28. Abdullah Annas, *Wiladat al-Afghan al-Arab* (The Birth of Arab-Afghans) (London: Dar al-Saqi, 2002), 34.

29. Author's observations and interviews with several Mujahedin commanders in the 1980s in Pakistan and in 2003–2004 in Kabul.

30. John Cooley, *Unholy Wars, Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 83–105.

31. Rodric Braithwaite, *Afghantsy, the Russians in Afghanistan, 1979–89* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 122; Gromov, *Ogranichennyy Kontingent*, 130; Russian General Staff, *The Soviet Afghan War—How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, trans. and ed. Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 17–18.

32. Russian General Staff, *Soviet Afghan War*, appendix 1, p. 320.

33. Ibid., 317, 320.

34. OOD stands for the Russian term *Otryad Obespichenia Dvezheni*, which means "movement support detachment."

35. Gromov, *Ogranichennyy Kontingent*, 122–123.

36. Pravda Correspondent I. Shchedrov's letter to the CC CPSU on the Situation in Afghanistan, November 12, 1981, Cold War International History Project, Wilson Center.

37. KGB border forces within Afghanistan are not included in this total. At peak strength, the KGB had three brigades inside Afghanistan. Including the KGB brings the total closer to 124,000 at peak strength.

38. Rogers*, The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan*, 8, cited in Andrew and Mitrokhin, *World Was Going Our Way*, 412.

39. “The Soviet Union and Afghanistan 1878–1989: Documents,” 180, cited in Andrew and Mitrokhin, *World Was Going Our Way*, 412.

40. Lyakhovsky, *Tragediya i Dobelst Afgana*, 261.

41. Yusaf and Adkin, *The Bear Trap*, 106.

42. Most of the mules used to transport arms and other supplies to the Mujahedin came from China over the Khunjerab Pass: Beardon and Risen, *The Main Enemy*, 312, cited in Andrew and Mitrokhin, *World Was Going Our Way*, 415.

43. Author’s interview with Commander Abdul Haq, Peshawar, September 1986.

44. Gromov, *Ogranichennyy Kontingent*, 130.

45. Ibid., 199.

46. Ibid., 203–204.

47. Author’s conversation with general Ismail Khan, Herat, summer of 2003.

48. Author’s conversation with (retired) Colonel Oleg Kulakov, professor of Moscow Defense University, in Beijing, June 2014. Doctor Kulakov participated in several Soviet operations in Afghanistan, including in the offensives in Panjsher Valley in 1980–1982.

49. This section about tactical forms of action draws on Ali Ahmed Jalali and Lester W. Grau, *The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahedin Tactics in the Soviet Afghan War* (Quantico, VA: United States Marine Corps Studies and Analysis Division, 1997).

50. Russian General Staff, *Soviet Afghan War*, 65.

51. Ibid., 68.

52. Ibid., 69.

53. Ibid., 73.

54. Lyakhovsky, *Tragediya i Dobelst Afgana*, 288.

55. Ibid., 192.

56. Examples of such operations are discussed in Lester W. Grau, *The Bear Went over the Mountain*: *Soviet Combat*

Tactics in Afghanistan (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2013).

57. From the Center for Preservation of Contemporary Documentation, Moscow, Fond 5, Opis 84, delo 855, translated by Svetlana Savranskaya, National Security Archive.

58. Maps annexed to Alexander Maiorov, *Pravda ob Afganskoy Voine* (Truth about the Afghan War) (Moscow: Pravo Chelaveka, 1996).

59. Mitrokhin, *KGB in Afghanistan*, 1:147.

60. Andrew and Mitrokhin, *World Was Going Our Way*, 408.

61. Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, 578–579, cited in ibid.

62. Mitrokhin, *KGB in Afghanistan*, 1:145–149.

63. Ibid., 141.

64. Author's interview with several former KHAD officers in the 1990s.

65. Mitrokhin, *KGB in Afghanistan*, 1:144.

66. Author's interview with Commander Gul Haidar of the Panjsher Front, in Panjsher, 2002.

67. Author's interview with several surviving Mujahedin commanders of the Panjsher Valley in April 2003 in Panjsher.

68. Alexander Lyakhovsky, *Commentary on* Ahmad Shah Massoud, revised 2012, http://artofwar.ru.

69. Hafizullah Mansour, *Panjsher dar dawran-e jihad* (Panjsher in the Jihad Period) (Peshawar: Mujahedin, 1991), 71.

70. Maiorov, *Pravda ob Afganskoy Voine*, 30–32.

71. Author's interview with Dr. Oleg Kulakov, professor at the Moscow Defense University, in Beijing, June 2014.

72. They included one regiment each of the Soviet 108th and 201st Motorized Rifle Divisions and the 103rd Airborne Division; the 66th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (based in Jalalabad), subunits from the 860th and

191st Separate Motorized Rifle Regiments, and the 345th Separate Parachute Regiment.

73. Russian General Staff, *Soviet Afghan War*, 80–81. The number of battalions inserted does not add up to 65. Lyakhovsky reports that 20 battalions were air-landed during the same period, which reflects an acceptable number. Alexander Lyakhovsky, Commentary on *Ahmad Shah Massoud*, Revised 2012. Http://artofwar.ru.

74. Russian General Staff, *Soviet Afghan War*, 81.

75. Edward Girardet, "Guerrillas Survive Biggest Attack Yet as Soviets Roar into Panjsher," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 22, 1982.

76. Mansur, *Panjsher dar dawran-e jihad*, 83.

77. Ibid., 94–97.

78. Gromov, *Ogranichennyy Kontingent*, 192.

79. Braithwaite, *Afghantsy*, 219; Lyakhovsky, *Commentary on* Ahmad Shah Massoud; Yusaf and Adkin, *The Bear Trap*, 72.

80. Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, 200–201.

81. Most of this part is based on Jalali and Grau, *The Other Side of the Mountain*, 317–326; and Grau and Jalali, "The Campaign for the Caves: The Battles of Zhawar in the Soviet-Afghan War," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 14, no. 3 (September 2001).

82. These included the 7th Infantry Division (2nd Army Corps) from Kandahar, the 8th Infantry Division (1st Army Corps) from Kabul, the 14th Infantry Division (3rd Army Corps) from Ghazni, the 25th Infantry Division (3rd Army Corps) from Khost, the 38th Commando Brigade, and the 666th Air Assault Regiment "Commando" (3rd Army Corps) from Khost.

83. Lyakhovsky, *Commentary on* Ahmad Shah Massoud, 300–301.

84. Interviews with Lieutenant Omar, Mawlawi Nezamuddin Haqani, and Mawlawi Abdul-Rahman in Jalali and Grau, *The Other Side of the Mountain*, 323.

85. Text of the correspondence in Lyakhovsky, *Tragediya i Dobelst Afgana*, 302–304.

86. Yusaf and Adkin, *The Bear Trap*, 170–171.

87. Grau and Jalali, “Campaign for the Caves.”

88. Ibid.

89. General Gulzarak Zadran, Lieutenant Omar, Mawlawi Nezamuddin Haqani, and Mawlawi Abdul-Rahman, “The Defense against the Soviet Operation ‘Magistral,’ ” in Jalali and Grau, *The Other Side of the Mountain*, 165–173.

90. Gromov, *Ogranichennyy Kontingent*, 300.

91. Author’s interview with former minister Suleiman Layeq, in Kabul, October 2014.

92. DShK stands for the Russian *Degtyaryova-Shpagina Krupnokaliberny*, meaning “Degtyaryov-Shpagin Large-Caliber,” which is a Soviet heavy machine.

93. General Gulzarak Zadran et al., in Jalali and Grau, *The Other Side of the Mountain*, 165–173.

94. Author’s interview with Suleiman Layeq, Summer 2005.

95. Gromov, *Ogranichennyy Kontingent*, 304.

96. Ibid.

97. General Gulzarak Zadran et al., in Jalali and Grau, *The Other Side of the Mountain*, 173.

98. Lyakhovsky, *Commentary on* Ahmad Shah Massoud, 176–177.

99. Ibid. See also Braithwaite, *Afghantsy*, 270–271; Cordovez and Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan*.

100. Braithwaite, *Afghantsy*, 271.

101. Bradsher, *Afghan Communism and the Soviet Intervention*, 171, cited in Andrew and Mitrokhin, *World Was Going Our Way*, 413.

102. “The Soviet Union and Afghanistan 1878–1989: Documents,” 180, cited in Andrew and Mitrokhin, *World Was Going Our Way*, 413.

103. Mary C. FitzGerald, *Marshal Ogarkov and the New Revolution in Soviet Military Affairs* (Alexandria, VA: Naval Warfare Operations Division, Hudson Institute, Center for Naval Analysis, 1987), 8.

104. Jonathan Haslam, *Russia's Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 341.

105. Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 171.

106. Andrew and Mitrokhin, *World Was Going Our Way*, 415.

107. Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 442–443, cited in Andrew and Mitrokhin, *World Was Going Our Way*, 416.

108. Andrew and Mitrokhin, *World Was Going Our Way*, 217.

109. Geneva Accords, April 14, 1988.

110. See *Consolidated Report of the Office of the United Nations Co-Ordinator for Humanitarian and Economic Assistance Programs Relating to Afghanistan*, Geneva, September 1988, pp. 60–64.

111. Author's interview with several former KHAD officials and former Mujahedin commanders in Kabul in 2003, 2006, and 2014.

112. Yusaf and Adkin, *The Bear Trap*, 220.

113. Gromov, *Ogranichennyy Kontingent*, 307.

114. For the details of the withdrawal, see the valuable study of Dr. Lester Grau, "Breaking Contact without Leaving Chaos—the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan," http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/withdrawal.pdf.

115. Ibid.

116. Russian General Staff, *Soviet Afghan War*, 88.

117. This included 115,308 cases of infectious hepatitis, 31,080 of typhoid fever, and 140,665 of other diseases. Of the 11,654 who were discharged from the

army after being wounded, maimed, or contracting serious diseases, 10,751 men were left disabled.

118. Gareev, *Moya Poslednyaya Voina*, 392–393.

119. Barnett Rubin, *Afghanistan from the Cold War through the War on Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 74.

11. The Civil War and the Rise of the Taliban

1. This included 16,500 troops in the army, 97,000 in the Ministry of Interior, and 57,000 in the Ministry of State Security. See M. A. Gareev, *Moya Poslednyaya Voina* (My Last War) (Moscow, INSAN, 1996), 192.

2. The new infantry divisions included the 9th Division in Kunar (which was later moved to Sorobi), the 2nd Division in Charikar, the 40th Division in Bagram, the 80th Division in Pul-e Khomri, the 5th Tsarandoy Division (forces of Ministry of Interior), the 10th WAD Division in the western suburbs of the capital, the 21st Division in Farah, the 60th Division of former border guard troops, the 70th WAD Division in Hairatan, and the 54th Division in Kunduz.

3. The 53rd Division comprised Dostum's 53rd Militia Regiment, Rasul Pahlawan's Militia Brigade in Maimana, and Ghafar Pahlawan's Militia Brigade in Sar-e Pul. Other militia formations included Esmat Muslim's Militia Force (deployed along the Kandahar-Chaman highway), Jabar's Tribal Militia Brigade in Helmand, Rasul-e Bikhoda's militia unit in Jawzjan, and the Hazara Militia Brigade in the western suburbs of Kabul. In addition to these, there were numerous tribal militia units in different provinces that were organized and controlled by the Ministry of National Security (WAD) and the Ministry of Tribes and Frontiers.

4. These were: the 1st Brigade in Nangrahar, the 2nd Brigade in Khost, the 3rd Brigade in Kandahar, the 4th Brigade in Nimroz, the 5th Brigade in Herat, the 6th Brigade in Waze Khwa (Paktika Province), the 7th Brigade

in Shindand, the 8th Brigade in Tsamkani (Paktia Province), the 9th Brigade in Orgun, the 10th Brigade in Kunar, the 11th Brigade in Helmand, the 14th Brigade in Jaji (Paktia Province). The 12th and 13th brigades were not fully organized. These units were half-staffed, totaling 30,000 troops.

5. The National Guard Corps was created after the Soviet withdrawal and included five well-equipped and highly paid brigades, all based in Kabul.

6. Gareev, *Moya Poslednyaya Voina*, 310–311.

7. Ibid., annexed map.

8. Diego Cordovez and Selig Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 371.

9. Author's interview with Dr. Taleb, Washington, April 1999.

10. Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars* (London: Penguin, 2005), 192–193.

11. Robert D. Kaplan, *Soldiers of God: With Islamic Warriors in Afghanistan and Pakistan* (New York: Vintage, 2001), 166.

12. Author's conversation with General Abdul Rahim Wardak, who served as one of the Mujahedin field commanders in the Jalalabad siege.

13. Brigadier Mohammad Yusaf and Major Mark Adkin, *The Bear Trap* (Lahore: Jang, 2002), 230 (originally published in London in 1992).

14. Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 541.

15. Peter Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 446.

16. Ibid., 452–453.

17. Barnett Rubin, *Afghanistan from the Cold War through the War on Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 85.

18. Felix Ermacora, UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan, “Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan,” *Report to the U.N. General Assembly*, October 30, 1990.

19. Author’s conversation with Senator Abdul Qodous Barakzai (Washington, September 1992), who took Najibullah’s message to Zahir Shah earlier that year.

20. Tschanguiz Pahlavan, “Afghanistan Emtedad-e Hayat-e Farhangi Mast” (Afghanistan Is the Extension of Our Cultural Life), *Donya-i-Sokhan* (January 1992), published in Tehran.

21. In the days immediately following the Mujahedin victory (April 1992), I was in Peshawar and noted that the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan was flooded by Kalashnikov assault rifles and handguns, which pushed market prices of weapons to a record low.

22. Author’s interview with Dr. Raz Mohammad Paktin, Minister of Interior in the Najibullah regime, Dushanbe, May 1995.

23. The shifting alliances that grouped the warring factions were mostly inspired by common threats. The alliance of the Rabbani-Masoud faction with the ex-Communist militia leader Rashid Dostum and Shi’ite parties against Hekmatyar’s Hezb-e Islami disintegrated once the Rabbani-Masoud government became a rival among its own allies. In 1994 Hekmatyar, Dostum, and the Shi’ite Wahdat party joined in an anti–Rabbani-Masoud coalition known as the High Council of Coordination (HCC). The defeat of Hekmatyar by the Taliban in 1995 pushed Hekmatyar to join his archrivals in the Rabbani-Masoud government. The fall of Kabul to the Taliban movement led to the cooperation of virtually all anti-Taliban forces in a united front.

24. See the report of UN Special Human Rights Rapporteur Felix Ermacora, E/CN4/1995/64, and January 20, 1995. See Walwaleji, *Dar Safahat-e Shamal-e*

Afghanistan Che Migozasht (What Was Happening in Northern Afghanistan) (Peshawar, 1999/1378), 22–24.

25. Cordovez and Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan*, 60–63.

26. Abdul Salam Zaeef, *My Life with the Taliban*, ed. Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 62–65.

27. Ahmad Rashid, *Taliban—Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 26.

28. Tomsen, *Wars of Afghanistan*, 535.

29. Author's conversation with the late Popalzai tribal chief Abdul Ahad Karzai, who was in Kandahar at that time. See also Rashid, *Taliban*, 28–29.

30. Tomsen, *Wars of Afghanistan*, 536.

31. Zaeef, *My Life with the Taliban*, 72–75.

32. Rashid, *Taliban*, 29.

33. The three were Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami, which fell to the Taliban in March 1994; Hezb-e Wahda, which was driven out of Kabul in 1995 and from its final base in Bamian in August 1998; and the Uzbek-led Jonbesh-e Mili Islami under Abdul Rashid Dostum and Malik, which was defeated in August 1998.

34. The United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan (UIFSA) commonly referred to as the United Front (Northern Alliance). It was formed around the forces of Ahmad Shah Masoud and included the remnants of the Wahdat, Jonbesh Mili Islami, Abdurrab Sayaf forces and elements that were once part of Hezb-e Islami of Gulboddin Hekmatyar. The UIFSA identified itself as the military forces of the "Islamic State of Afghanistan" under the ousted president Burhanuddin Rabbani.

35. About 400 new pickup trucks were said to have been imported from Pakistan for the operation. *Asiaweek*, August 28, 1998.

36. Ralph Magnus and Eden Naby, *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid* (Boulder: Westview, 2002), 190.

37. Ahmad Rashid, “The New Proxy War,” *Far Eastern Economic Review* (February 1, 1996).

38. *Agence France Press* (*AFP) News*, April 21, 1997.

39. Author’s conversation with the head of the UN Peace Mission to Afghanistan, Ambassador Mahmoud Mistiri, February 1996.

40. Kammal Kharazi, “What We Want in Afghanistan,” *Washington Post*, November 4, 1996.

41. Amnesty International Press Release, September 3, 1998.

42. According to Amnesty International, about 2,000 bodies, which were discovered in mass graves in northern Afghanistan, were those of the Taliban militia who had been dispatched to capture the city of Mazar-i-Sharif in May 1997. Amnesty International Report, *Afghanistan: Reports of Mass Graves of Taliban Militia*, ASA 11/11/97, November 1997.

43. The total strength of Iran’s active armed forces was estimated to be over a half-million troops (545,000). The country could also mobilize a 350,000-strong reserve force and 70,000 paramilitary troops. See Anthony Cordesman, “Military Trends in Iran,” *CSIS*, February 1998, 22.

44. *BBC News*, September 18, 1998.

45. Sadiq Zebakalam, political scientist at Tehran University, quoted by Scott Peterson in his article: “Iran Split over How to Punish Afghans,” *Christian Science Monitor*, September 30, 1998.

46. “United Front” is the term used by its members. The Taliban called them the “Northern Alliance”—a term picked up and used by the world press. This book uses “United Front” and “Northern Alliance” interchangeably.

47. Some key former Mujahedin commanders who joined the Taliban include Mawlawi Jalaluddin Haqani of Paktia, Mohammad Moussa of Maidan, Anwar Dangar of Shakar-Dara (north of Kabul), the late Aref Khan of Kunduz, Bashir of Baghlan, and many others.

48. In February 2000, eyewitnesses put the pay for a substitute at an equivalent of 10 dollars per conscript per month.

49. Prior to the summer offensive north of Kabul in 1999, about 10,000 young men were reportedly recruited in Nangrahar and other nearby provinces. *Agence France Press* (*AFP) News*, July 29, 1999.

50. Ahmad Rashid, "Rewriting the Rules of the Great Game: Talibanization," *Foreign Affairs*, November 1999.

51. Ibid.; *Reuters*, July 28, 1999; *Electronic Telegraph*, July 22, 1999; *Asiaweek*, August 6, 1999.

52. UN Security Council Statement, October 25, 1999.

53. Anthony Davis, "Wanted by Washington: A Saudi Recluse Is the Prime Bombings Suspect," *Asiaweek*, August 28, 1998, 32.

54. Interview with several former Afghan officers in Peshawar (January 2000) who had fought in Afghanistan.

55. Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda* (New York: Berkley Books, 2003), 78–80.

56. Ismail Khan and Steve Le Vine, "The Rebel Connection," *Newsweek International*, March 13, 2000.

57. Assadullah Walwaleji, *Dar Safahat-e Shamal-e Afghanistan Che Migozasht*, 42–43.

58. "Afghanistan's Taliban," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 7, no. 7 (July 1995).

59. Anthony Davis, "Afghanistan Reorganizes to Counter Taliban Push," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, July 4, 2001.

60. The 5th Corps comprised the 40th Infantry Division in Bagram and the 2nd Infantry Division in Jabal-Seraj. Masoud heavily equipped and reinforced the corps, which included three divisions deployed in Bagram-Charikar, Jabal-Seraj, and northern Salang.

61. The Corps included the 54th Infantry Division in Kunduz, the 55th Infantry Division in Takhar, and the 20th Infantry Division in Badakhshan.

62. The equipment included most of the tanks of the 16th Tank Division (50 tanks) and other armored vehicles, surface-to-surface missile batteries of R-300s (SCUD) and Lunas (FROG-7), multirocket launcher artillery (BM-21 and BM-22), and two Mi-25 HIND helicopters.

63. *Agence France Press (AFP) News*, July 29, 1999.

64. The vehicle, nicknamed *Ahu*, "the deer," was widely used in Mujahedin operations, particularly in Kandahar, Helmand, Farah, and Nimroz Provinces during the war with Soviet forces.

65. Some estimates put the Taliban losses on the Maidan and Chaharasia axes at 2,500 killed.

66. The so-called old road is the paved highway connecting Kabul to Charikar. It connects several small towns of the Kohdaman plain to the capital. In 1987 because of intense Mujahedin activity along the road, the Moscow-backed Najibullah government constructed a new road to the north along the traditional path to Bagram. The road was used for land transport between Kabul and the Bagram air base. It is called the new road.

67. *Reuters*, July 28, 1999; *Associated Press*, July 29, 1999; *AFP*; *BBC News*, July 29–30, 1999; *Reuters*, August 6, 1999.

68. Interview with several eyewitnesses in Peshawar, March 2000.

69. A good example is the Taliban's capture of the Sher Khan Bandar and Imam Saheb Districts at the beginning of March 2000, only to lose them three days later on March 5 as a result of a United Front counterattack.

70. Such as Chinese 107 mm MBRL (BM-12) and SBRL (BM-1), Egyptian Saqar-20 and Saqar-30 SSM, ZGU-1 and DShK heavy machine guns, 82 mm mortars, Orlikan antiaircraft guns, antitank TOW and recoilless rifles and RPG-7s, Stinger and Blowpipe shoulder air defense missiles, and the like.

71. Including S-300 (SCUD) and Luna-M (FROG-7) SSM, Dvina (SAM-2) and Pechura (SAM-3), Grad (BM-21) and Orlikan (BM-22) MBRL, T-34, T-54, T-55, and T-62 tanks; BMP-1 and BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles; 76 mm, 100 mm, 122 mm, and 152 mm artillery pieces, and the like.

72. Each of the six pods of rocket launchers mounted on the plane held 32 rockets. The rocket fire impact area covered 500 square meters. Interview with a former general of the United Front, Peshawar, February 2000.

73. Anthony Davis, "Afghanistan Reorganizes to Counter Taliban Push," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, July 4, 2001.

74. Mig-21, Su-7, Su-20, Su-22, and Il-39 aircraft.

75. An-12, An-26, AN-32, and Yak-40 aircraft.

76. Mi-8, Mi-17, and Mi-24 helicopters.

77. These bases were in Kabul, Bagram, Kandahar, Shindand, and Mazar-i-Sharif.

78. Author's interview with a Taliban air force officer, Washington, April 2000.

79. Almost half of the combat planes were Su-20s and Su-22s. Both were export models of the Russian-built Su-17 fighter bomber. The other half included Mig-21 interceptors and ground attack fighters. The Taliban also converted a few Il-39 trainer aircraft to bombers.

80. Author's interview with a Taliban air force officer, Washington, April 2000; and interviews with several Afghan officers in Peshawar, February–March 2000.

81. *Agence France Press (AFP) News*, July 28, 1999.

12. The US Invasion, the Fall of the Taliban, and the Bonn Process

1. General Tommy Franks, *American Soldier* (New York: Regan, 2004), 250–251.

2. George Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm—My Years at the CIA* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 207.

3. Peter Beaumont, Kamal Ahmed, Ed Villainy, Jason Burke, Chris Stephen, Tim Judah, and Paul Harris, “The Rout of the Taliban,” *Observer*, Sunday, November 18, 2001.

4. Franks, *American Soldier*, 269–272.

5. Parvez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 201.

6. Abdul Salam Zaeef, *My Life with the Taliban*, ed. Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 146–147.

7. The efforts are detailed in a CIA diary published in Robert L. Grenier, *88 Days to Kandahar* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015).

8. Gary C. Schroen, *First In: An Insider’s Account of How the CIA Spearheaded the War on Terror in Afghanistan* (New York: Ballantine, 2005), 178–179.

9. Among the main recipients of the funds were General Qasim Fahim, Arif Sarwari, Professor Sayaf, Atta Mohammad of Balkh, Haji Mohammad Mohaqeq, and Doctor Abdullah. See Schroen, *First In*, 28, 33, 36–37, 71, 92, 96, 117, 195.

10. Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm*, 210.

11. Doug Stanton, *Horse Soldiers* (New York: Scriber’s, 2009), 53.

12. The Corps included the 54th Infantry Division, previously deployed in Kunduz and withdrawn to the east after the fall of Kunduz to the Taliban. The other two divisions were the 55th in Takhar and the 20th in Badakhshan.

13. US Army Center of Military History, *Operation Enduring Freedom: October 2001–March 2002* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2003), 11.

14. Franks, *American Soldier*, 310–311.

15. Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm*, 213.

16. Ibid.

17. Franks, *American Soldier*, 310–311.
18. Author's interview in Peshawar, February 2002, with several Afghan commanders who were mobilized by the ISI to help build the Pashtun anti-Taliban fronts in the south.
19. Franks, *American Soldier*, 303–304.
20. The CH-47 helicopter, also known as the Chinook, is an American twin-engine and twin-rotor heavy-lift helicopter with the primary roles of troop movement, artillery placement, and battlefield resupply. It is among the heaviest-lifting Western helicopters and the longest-serving helicopter in service (since 1962).
21. Stanton, *Horse Soldiers*, 242–245.
22. Ali bin Talib was the cousin of the Prophet Mohammad and the Fourth Caliph.
23. Stanton, *Horse Soldiers*, 259–264.
24. Gary Berntsen and Ralph Pezzullo, *Jawbreaker: A Personal Account by CIA's Key Field Commander* (New York: Crown, 2006), 105.
25. Author's interview with Taliban participants in the battle north of Kabul, 2002.
26. US Army Center of Military History, *Operation Enduring Freedom*, 15.
27. Peter Beaumont et al., "The Rout of the Taliban."
28. Ahmad Rashid, *Descent into Chaos* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 91.
29. Stanton, *Horse Soldiers*, 283.
30. Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 90–91.
31. US Army Center of Military History, *Operation Enduring Freedom*, 18.
32. Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 93.
33. "The Truth about Dasht-i-Leili," *New York Times*, editorial, July 13, 2009.
34. Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm*, 218.
35. Din Mohammad, Azizullah, *Ham dah woo Abdul Haq* (So This Was Abdul Haq) (Peshawar: Samim Literary Association, 2010), 229–251.

36. Berntsen and Pezzullo, *Jawbreaker*, 81.

37. Peter Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 218.

38. Eric Belehm, *The Only Thing Worth Dying For* (New York: Harper, 2010), 61–62.

39. Author's conversation with President Karzai, in Kabul, in February 2002.

40. Author's interview in Kabul, in March 2002, with Mohammad Shah Kako, who accompanied Karzai to Tirin Kot in Urozgan.

41. Belehm, *The Only Thing Worth Dying For*, 72–73. I personally heard the same story several times from Karzai.

42. Author's conversation in Kabul, in February 2002, with President Karzai and Mohammad La'l, who accompanied him to Jacobabad.

43. US Army Center of Military History, *Operation Enduring Freedom*, 22–23.

44. Author's conversation with Hamid Karzai, in Kabul, on May 22, 2016.

45. Kim Murphy and John Hendren, "Taliban Offers to Give Up Kandahar But U.S. Opposes Any Amnesty for Regime's Leaders," *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 2001.

46. *Campaign against Terror*, PBS Frontline, aired September 8, 2002.

47. Ali Jalali, "The Cave Warfare Demands Patience," *New York Times*, Opinion Page, December 8, 2001.

48. Philip Smucker, *Al Qaeda's Great Escape* (Dulles, VA: Brassey's, 2004), 89.

49. Author's interview with Haji Zaman's commanders in Kabul in 2003.

50. US Army Center of Military History, *Operation Enduring Freedom*, 26–27.

51. Mary Anne Weaver, "Lost at Tora Bora," *New York Times Magazine*, September 11, 2005.

52. The Delta Forces is a US Army Special Operation Force formed in the 1970s as a full-time counterterrorism

unit.

53. The GATOR is a system of American airdropped, antitank, and antipersonnel mines developed in the 1980s used to cover a large area by mines when delivered by aircraft or by land-based dispensers and helicopters.

54. Dalton Fury, *Kill Ben Laden: A Delta Force Commander's Account of the Hunt for the World's Most Wanted Man* (New York: St. Martin Griffin, 2008), 29.

55. Weaver, "Lost at Tora Bora."

56. Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 98.

57. PBS, Frontline, Interview with US Army General Tommy Frank, June 12, 2002, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/campaign/interviews/franks.html.

58. Weaver, "Lost at Tora Bora."

59. Melinda Henneberger, "A Nation Challenged: Afghan Exile; Ex-King Meets Taliban Foes and 11 from US Congress," *New York Times*, October 1, 2001.

60. Bob Woodward, *Obama's War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 195.

61. James F. Dobbins, *After the Taliban: Nation Building in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2008), 11.

62. The Shura-i-Nazar (Supervisory Council) was formed by the late Ahmad Shah Massoud in the northeastern provinces of Afghanistan within the predominately Tajik Jamiat-i-Islami (Islamic Society) party. Much of the group's strength was based in the Panjsher Valley, Massoud's home district.

63. Dobbins, *After the Taliban*, 56.

64. Author's conversation with Dr. Abdullah, Kabul, in summer 2003.

65. Dobbins, *After the Taliban*, 57.

66. Ibid., 55, 75.

67. Author's conversation with Ambassadors Zalmai Khalilzad and James Dobbins.

68. Articles 1 and 2 of the text *Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Reestablishment of Permanent Government Institutions*.

69. Author's conversation in Kabul, in spring 2002, with several Afghan delegates to the meeting.

70. Author's conversation in Kabul, in summer 2003, with Dr. Zalmai Khalilzad, who had spoken with the king.

71. Dobbins, *After the Taliban*, 90.

72. Lester W. Grau and Dodge Billingsley, *Operation Anaconda: America's First Major Battle in Afghanistan* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 82.

73. These nations included the United States, Canada, Norway, Denmark, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, and Turkey.

74. Grau and Billingsley, *Operation Anaconda*, 121.

75. Ibid.

76. Smucker, *Al Qaeda's Great Escape*, 161.

77. Author's interview in Kabul, in March 2002, with several inhabitants of Zurmat.

78. Smucker, *Al Qaeda's Great Escape*, 159.

79. These included Special Forces teams from the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Norway, Denmark, and Australia.

80. US Army Center of Military History, *Operation Enduring Freedom*, 32–33.

81. Author's conversation, in Rome, in February 2002, with former King Zahir Shah and his son-in-law General Abdul Wali.

82. Author's interviews in Kabul, in August 2002, with several top supporters of the former King Zahir Shah who participated in the emergency *Loya Jirga*.

83. Zalmay Khalilzad, *The Envoy: From Kabul to the White House, My Journey through a Turbulent World* (New York: St. Martin Press, 2016), 143–145.

84. David Buchbinder, "Afghans Ask: Whose Army Is It?," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 17, 2002.

85. Afghan Ministry of Defense, *Assassat-i Sakhtar-i-Tashkilati Ordu-i-Mili wa Jamawari Asleha* (The Principles of Organizational Structure of the National Army and Arms Collection), Kabul, October 2002.

86. "Karzai Moves to Rein In Warlords," *BBC News*, December 16, 2002.

87. Pamela Constable, "Afghanistan Violence Flares," *Washington Post*, September 6, 2002.

88. The UN report estimates the total production of opium this year at 3,400 tons, compared with 185 tons in 2001, when the Taliban had banned the crop. See Alessandra Rizzo, "U.N.: Afghanistan Top Opium Producer," *Associated Press*, October 29, 2002.

89. Human Rights Watch Report, *Afghanistan: Paying for the Taliban's Crimes*, April 2002.

90. Human Rights Watch Report, *Ethnic Attacks in Afghanistan*, April 9, 2002. See also Human Rights Watch, *Afghanistan: Warlords Return*, *Mazar-e Sharif Afghanistan*, June 6, 2002.

13. Conclusion

1. Although the UN Security Council (UNSC) did not authorize the US-led military campaign, it was widely perceived to be a legitimate form of self-defense under the UN Charter. Further, the UNSC authorized the creation of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to assist the post-Taliban Afghan government in maintaining security. The ISAF command was passed to NATO on August 11, 2003, and its mandate has been annually renewed by the UNSC.

2. "Afghanistan's Marshal Plan," *New York Times*, April 19, 2002.

3. "Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction," *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, July 30, 2016, 46.

4. The cost of the Marshall Plan was 13.3 billion dollars, which equates to 103.4 billion in today's dollars.

5. James R. Petersen, "Was $73B of Afghan Aid Wasted?," *Politico*, January 11, 2012.

6. John Paul Vann (July 2, 1924–June 9, 1972) was a lieutenant colonel in the United States Army, later retired, who became well known for his role in the Vietnam War. He tried to push the army away from massive bombardment and toward counterinsurgency against the Viet Cong. Vann died when his helicopter crashed in the jungle.

7. *Afghanistan: Good-Neighborly Relations*, December 24, 2002. Other UN Document UN Security Council No. S/2002/1416. The countries signing included China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.

8. In an interview with Jon Boone of the *Guardian* (February 13, 2015), former Pakistani president Parvez Musharraf admitted that when he was in power (1999–2008), Pakistan sought to undermine the government of former Afghan president Hamid Karzai because Karzai had "helped India to stab Pakistan in the back."

9. Afghanistan Compact, *Building on Success*, London Conference, January 31–February 1, 2006.

10. Gerry J. Gilmore, *American Forces Press*, US Department of Defense, December 11, 2007.

11. General David Richards, *Taking Command* (London: Headline, 2014), 251.

12. Ibid.

13. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC), *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2015 Executive Summary*, October 2015, 5–7.

14. Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy, "The Ironies of Afghan Opium Production," *Asia Times*, September 17, 2003.

15. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007*, August 2007, 1. In 2013 that number was US $4,500.

16. Greg Jaffe, “Abiding Some Afghan Graft,” *Washington Post*, September 4, 2010.

17. Ali A. Jalali, “Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces, Mission, Challenges, Sustainability,” USIP Peacework, May 2016, 3.

18. Vance Serchuk, “Don’t Undercut the Afghan Army,” *Washington Post*, June 2, 2006, 19.

19. Author’s interview in Kabul, in March 2016, with senior officials of Afghanistan’s National Security Council.

20. Asia Foundation, *A Survey of the Afghan People 2015*, November 2015, 49.

21. Ben Connable and Martin C. Libicki, “How Insurgencies End,” *RAND Corporation* 153 (2010): 153.

22. Marcus Luttrell with Patrick Robinson, *Lone Survivor: The Eyewitness Account of Operation Redwing and the Lost Heroes of SEAL Team 10* (New York: Little, Brown, 2007), 230–293.

23. The man was a Pashtun villager in the village of Sabray, roughly 0.7 miles (1.1 kilometers) down the northeast gulch of Shawtalo Sar from the location of the ambush.

24. Richards, *Taking Command*, 233.

25. Colonel Bernd Horn, *No Lack of Courage—Operation Medusa, Afghanistan* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2010), 121–143.

26. Ibid., 145–148.

27. Author’s interview with General Lord Richards, in October 2014.

28. Richards, *Taking Command*, 190–191.

29. Ibid., 234.

30. It referred to the Second Battle of Fallujah fought in December 2004 by joint American, Iraqi, and British forces. The operation, code-named al-Fajr (Dawn), was led by the US Marine Corps against insurgents’ stronghold in the Iraqi city of Falluja, which was described by the US military as “some of the heaviest urban combat US

Marines have been involved in since the 1968 Battle of Hue City in Vietnam."

31. Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 569.

32. Kai Eide, *Power Struggle over Afghanistan* (New York: Skyhorse, 2010), 107–109.

33. Bob Woodward, *Obama's War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 128.

34. Eide, *Power Struggle over Afghanistan*, 111.

35. Woodward, *Obama's War*, 105.

36. Gates, *Duty*, 342.

37. Woodward, *Obama's War*, 178.

38. Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin, 2013), 345.

39. Woodward, *Obama's War*, 218.

40. Gates, *Duty*, 358.

41. Kai Eide, *Power Struggle over Afghanistan*, 172–173. I heard this repeatedly from Karzai in my meetings with him.

42. Ibid., 202.

43. Woodward, *Obama's War*, 284–285.

44. Gates, *Duty*, 569–570.

45. President Barack Obama, *Obama's Address on the War in Afghanistan* (address, US Military Academy, West Point, NY, December 1, 2009), transcription published in the *New York Times*.

46. NATO/ISAF, *Afghanistan: The London Conference, Communiqué*, January 28, 2010.

47. Author's conversation in Kabul, on May 22, 2016, with Mr. Hamid Karzai.

48. In an interview with the *Guardian*, former Pakistani president Parvez Musharraf admitted that "Pakistani spies in the Inter-Services Intelligence directorate (ISI) cultivated the Taliban after 2001 because Karzai's government was dominated by non-Pashtuns, the country's largest ethnic group, and officials who were thought to favor India." See

Jon Boone, “Musharraf: Pakistan and India’s Backing for ‘Proxies’ in Afghanistan Must Stop,” *Guardian*, February 13, 2015.

49. These included many allies of President Karzai who fought with him against the Taliban or those who were actively cooperating with the government.

50. Dawlat Islamia fi Iraq and Sham (DA’ISH) in Arabic, meaning the “Islamic State in Iraq and Sham [Levant].”

51. Statement by Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook on the US airstrike against the Taliban leader Mullah Mansur, Press Operation, Release No. NR-183–16, May 21, 2016.

52. North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Warsaw Summit Declaration on Afghanistan*, July 9, 2016.

53. “Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction,” *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, July 30, 2016, 4.

54. Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, October 4–5, 2016, communiqué issued on October 5, 2016, by 75 countries and 26 international organizations participating in Brussels Conference on Afghanistan.

55. Jalali, “Afghanistan National Defense and Security Force,” 28.

56. Department of Defense, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, Report to Congress, June 2016, 6.

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